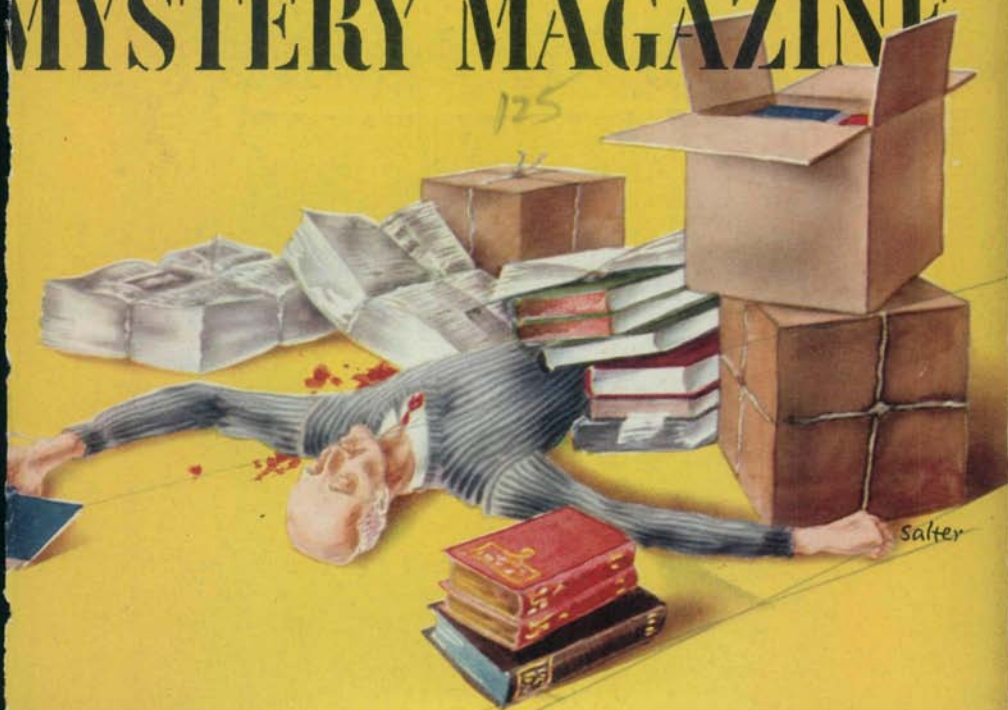


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THOMAS FLANAGAN

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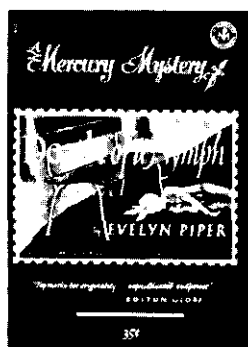
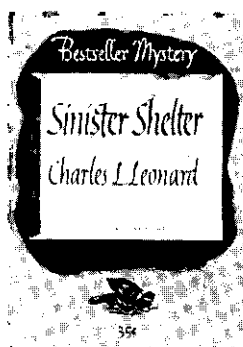
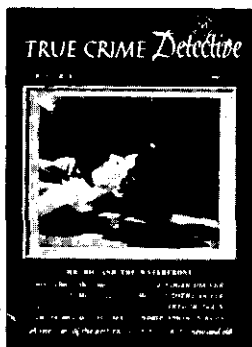
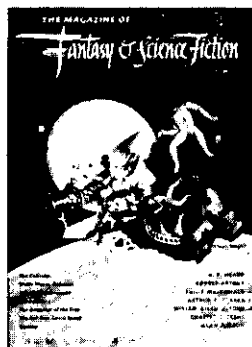


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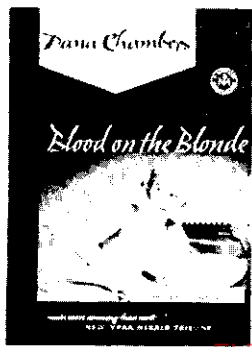
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\$2,000 FIRST PRIZE WINNER

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The Un-Strange Case of the

TWO HEADED MAN



IVOR BROWN, associate editor of the London Observer, has said it better than we can:

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Complete List of the 30 Prize-Winning Stories in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest

HONOR ROLL OF THE DETECTIVE-CRIME SHORT STORY, 1952

FIRST PRIZE

The Cold Winds of Adesta

by Thomas Flanagan

SPECIAL AWARD OF MERIT

The Singing Stick

by Edgar Pangborn

SECOND PRIZES

Spring Fever

by Dorothy Salisbury Davis

Tyger! Tyger!

by A. H. Z. Carr

The Best of Everything

by Stanley Ellin

Homecoming

by Veronica Parker Johns

The Challenge

by John W. Vandercook

THIRD PRIZES

Mom Knows Best

by James Yaffe

The House That Nella Lived In

by Mabel Seeley

Always Trust a Cop

by Octavus Roy Cohen

Farewell, Big Sister

by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

The Feeble Folk

by E. C. Bentley

Knowing What I Know Now

by Barry Perowne

The Green Weed

by Margaret Page Hood

5 - 4 = Murderer

by Baynard Kendrick

SPECIAL AWARDS

The Snows of Bardonechhia

by Gertrude Diamant

Dark Interlude

by Jane McClure

The Tea Pusher

by Howard Schoenfeld

An Episode at the Honey-pot

by Mark Van Doren

The Pigeon Woman

by Q. Patrick

Torrid Zone

by Fletcher Flora

Friend of the Family

by Robert Passano

The Unpleasantness at the

Stooges Club

by W. Heidenfeld

(continued on next page)

SPECIAL AWARDS FOR "FIRST STORIES"

Papa's Going Bye-Bye
Crime à la Carte
The Horns Were Wet
Honest Abe
You Got to Have Luck
Dear Departed Harold
Morte d'Alain

by Kitty Harwood
by John Eugene Hasty
by Howard F. Aldridge
by Elba O. Carrier
by S. R. Ross
by Barbara Vetterlein
by Maxey Brooke

The story that won First Prize in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest — Thomas Flanagan's "The Cold Winds of Adesta" — is projected as the first of a series of short stories about Major Tennente, a professional soldier who is also a professional policeman. The author tells us that he first saw the character of Tennente in such things as a trivial gesture, a limp, a turn of phrase, and finally, a way of thinking, all set against a particular landscape in the world of 1952. But it was Tennente's way of thinking that ultimately bored its way under the author's skin and into his mind. Are we not all deeply concerned, Mr. Flanagan reminds us, with the man of today who finds himself pushed into an ambiguous, even untenable, position? Tennente is that man: as a professional soldier, he wants more than anything else to live by the code of honor — yet it is the dilemma of our time that Tennente lives in a world where honor no longer seems to have any meaning.

Major Tennente is a military policeman in the service of his country — which is to say, in the service of its ruler, the General. Tennente has no choice but to carry out the letter of the law, as his General has laid down the law; but the spirit of the law — which Tennente cannot and will not overlook — obviously means different things to the General and to the Major. The General, who might be any tyrant in any part of the world, has created a way of life in which only the lie, the evasion, and the constant shadow of cruelty have meaning. That is not Tennente's way of life, but it is Tennente's fate, and the fate of so many others, to find themselves caught, perhaps trapped, in such a way of living.

So Tennente asks himself: "In such a world as this, how may one be decent?" Perhaps the real answer, the only answer, is that one cannot: a nation or a political program may be so hopelessly corrupt that to touch it,

or be touched by it, is to become permanently infected. But Tennente makes the dangerous attempt — the attempt to be a decent man.

Your Editors see Major Tennente as the thinking man of today — torn, disillusioned, and critically susceptible to a destroying cynicism — all set against the background, in Tennente's case, of a confused and decaying civilization. But there is hope. That is the message which must be driven home: while there are men like Tennente alive, there is hope. The human animal still retains a higher code — the code of loyalty: loyalty, in the larger sense, to oneself and to one's principles; loyalty, in the smaller sense, to discipline. There is still honor among men.

Thus, Major Tennente symbolizes the policeman-soldier, in the year 1952, who never asks Cain's question, because he knows without asking that he, and all those who are like him, are indeed their brothers' keepers . . .

THE COLD WINDS OF ADESTA

by THOMAS FLANAGAN

THERE ARE THE HEADLIGHTS," THE young lieutenant said. "He is coming." The lieutenant, in his fur-collared greatcoat, was standing by the dirt-streaked window, looking across the pass.

"How long does the trip take?" Major Tennente asked.

"It is five minutes from the border of the Republic, and he is under observation all that time. We can watch his lights."

Tennente drew a thin, twisted cigar from his pocket and lit it. The wind hurled itself against the hut, shaking the single window. He looked up from the chair in which he was sitting, and in the light of the flickering gasoline lamp he seemed old to the lieutenant. The yellow light caught his hollowed-out cheeks, his

thin hooked nose, but left his eyes in shadow.

"Is it always like this here?" he asked.

"This is a bad night and the bad season," Lieutenant Bonares said. "It is the wind cutting down the pass between the mountains. They speak of the cold winds of Adesta."

Tennente did not reply. He held the cigar between his teeth, his hands thrust deep into his pockets. He watched the young lieutenant at the window place his hand nervously on his automatic, then drop it to his side. A whistle blew shrilly.

"He has passed the roadblock," Bonares said. "The men outside will stop him now."

When the lieutenant had left the hut, Tennente stood up, a thin, bent

man, and, limping slightly, walked to the window. The heavy, closed truck had been halted before the hut, and by the light of the full moon Tennente could see Bonares speaking to the driver, who was gesturing angrily. Bonares turned to the two slouching troopers and they walked toward the truck. The driver climbed down then and went with Bonares to the hut. He knows his work, that young man, Tennente thought. He continued to stare out the window when he heard the door open behind him. The moon illuminated the mountainsides and the winding road between them, and he could see, far off, the lighted windows of the Republic frontier post across the border. Then he turned.

The driver was a soft, fleshy man, incongruously dressed in cap and windbreaker. There was a dead cigarette in the corner of his strangely thin mouth, which gave him a puckish, age-denying quality.

"This is Gomar," the lieutenant said. "We are old friends by now, aren't we, Gomar?"

Gomar smiled amusedly at Tennente, whom he had been watching through half-closed eyes, and shrugged.

"You transport wines?" Tennente asked.

"Anything but wines. Ask the lieutenant here. I carry guns, drugs, women. Whatever you say I carry."

"He brings wine from the Republic," Bonares said.

Tennente stepped away from the

window and walked across the loose planking to the center of the room. His eyes, the eyes of a tired, watchful hawk, were no longer in shadow. "Listen to me, Gomar. I will give you a wise thought. When I speak to you, answer me properly. Answer me clearly and plainly."

"Yes," Gomar said. "I transport wine."

"We produce much wine in this country," Tennente said. He removed the cigar from his strong, discolored teeth. "You can't make money by bringing more in."

"That is my affair. If I don't use this pass, I will use one far to the south. If you close all the passes to me, I will ship by boat and go bankrupt. That is your affair."

"Yes," Tennente said. "It is. But the pass of Adesta is almost never used. Why did you choose it?"

Gomar shrugged. "It was convenient. I carry wine from the Republic. I am licensed in both countries. It is my own concern what pass I use."

"How did you manage to get an importing license?"

"I bribed an official in the capital."

The lieutenant walked toward him stiffly, but Gomar reached in his pocket for a box of matches and re-lit his cigarette.

Tennente chuckled appreciatively. "You are an unusual merchant, Gomar. How is it that you drive your own truck?"

"Perhaps it is because my profits are small. Perhaps it is because I like the night air." Gomar drew in on his

cigarette. "And I am tired of questions. My truck is open for inspection."

Tennente looked at him a moment, and then said, "Thank you." He jerked his head and the others followed him outside. The wind thrust him back against the door for a moment, but he shook off Bonares's hand. "Show me how you search," he said.

At Bonares's order, the troopers opened the truck and removed the casks, placing them on the hard, snow-covered ground in front of the headlights. They shook each cask. They went over the truck carefully. Bonares had trained them well, or perhaps they were particularly zealous in the presence of an official from the capital. Then they stood before the major, working their numb, cold-clumsy fingers.

"Open one of the casks," Tennente said.

"That isn't necessary," Gomar said in sudden anger. "You can tell what is in a cask by shaking it. At least, you can tell whether it is wine or guns."

"Why do you think we are looking for guns?" Tennente asked.

"Because I am not a fool. Only gunrunning would bring a major of police to the pass of Adesta in winter."

"Open a cask," Tennente said to the soldiers.

"I am not sure we have orders for that," Bonares said. "You must take the responsibility, Major."

Tennente reached out suddenly and drew the lieutenant's automatic from its holster, flicked off the safety catch, and emptied the gun into one of the casks. The wine ran blood-red on the snow. He handed the gun, butt first, to Bonares, who received it in stunned admiration.

"That wine cost me a great deal of money," Gomar said evenly. "You are a violent man, Major —"

"Tennente."

He saw Gomar's eyes widen imperceptibly. "I understand your violence now, Major. You have that reputation."

Tennente threw down his cigar. "I am not violent, but my temper is short. When you return to town, file a report. It will be buried with a pile of other complaints." He turned to the soldiers, who had been watching him with quiet, frightened eyes. "Load his truck carefully. Wine should not be mistreated." Tennente watched them, and then watched Gomar's truck begin to move down the twisting, dangerous road toward the lights of the town of Adesta. Then he walked back into the hut, with the lieutenant following him.

Tennente stood wordlessly at the window while Bonares heated coffee on the alcohol stove. When Bonares brought the coffee to him, he wrapped his hands gratefully about the hot white cup and held it without drinking.

"How often does he make the trip?" Tennente asked.

"Every night."

"So? For wine, every night. And how long has he been doing this?"

"He began two weeks ago."

"Where does he go now?"

"There is only one place to go — the town of Adesta. And he does not stop on the road. They have watched his lights. From the terrace of the hotel, you can see the road clear up to the hut here." Bonares hesitated, and then said, "It is guns we are looking for, isn't it?"

Tennente looked at him. The lieutenant was a slim man and very young. His eyes were clear and dark against his olive skin. "Yes," Tennente said. "It is guns."

"It does not seem possible," Bonares said. "But of course in the capital they understand these things better."

"Why does it not seem possible, Lieutenant?" Tennente asked. He lifted the white cup to his lips and drank from it.

Bonares looked at him perplexedly. "Because we would find them when we search. Unless, of course, Gomar is a ghost."

Tennente turned away from the window and walked to the table, where he set down the coffee cup gently. "No, Gomar is not a ghost. But in a sense the guns are. They are dead men's guns."

Bonares began to question him, then changed his mind, and finally asked, "You know how he does it?"

Tennente shook his head. "You can phone to the town for my car, Lieutenant."

The young man hesitated again, then spoke. "Major?"

"Yes?"

"If I can be of help to you while you are here, will you use me?"

"Why are you so anxious to be of use?"

Bonares smiled with engaging candor. "I am a junior lieutenant on a border post. If I am able to help you, in twenty years I may be a senior lieutenant. Why do you ask?"

"In this country everyone is patriotic for a reason," Tennente said. "I like to collect those reasons. It is a hobby of mine. Phone now, Lieutenant."

Colonel Jarel felt that he had reason to be troubled, for Tennente was a troublesome person. Tennente was a rash man and an insolent one. It was said that he was insolent even to the General. From his office window, Jarel could see Tennente crossing the square toward him. The major was carrying the canvas-wrapped package which he had brought with him yesterday, when he first came to Adesta. The colonel, who knew what the package contained, shuddered slightly. The sun still fell in a golden wash on the white buildings and suffused the plaza, and the armed and solitary patrol still moved untroubled among the villagers. But Jarel had only to look again at the hungry, predatory figure approaching his office to lose once more his lightly held ease.

The major had not shaved and his uniform was unpressed; cigars bulged

from his tunic pocket, and his garrison cap was pushed back from the high, creased forehead. That is how officers looked before the days of the General, Jarel thought. Tennente limped into the room, rested the bundle on the desk, and then sat down. The colonel turned away from the window and looked at him. "You saw Gomar last night?" the colonel asked.

"I saw Gomar. I saw his wine."

"But no guns?"

Tennente shook his head. "No, no guns."

"Because he carries no guns," Jarel said. "Because there are no guns. Not in this region."

"Gomar drives his truck up the pass and into the Republic. When he comes back, he carries guns as well as wine."

Jarel groaned to himself: all that business of yesterday over again, and even after Tennente had made his own inspection. "How?" he asked with constrained politeness.

"I don't know that. Yet."

Jarel walked to the desk and sat behind it facing Tennente, hating the major's drawn, tired face, the watchful eyes. "You have checked the truck. I have checked the truck. Bonares has checked it. The casks are examined. The truck itself is examined. There is only wine."

"Guns come down from the pass," Tennente said, with his maddening, calm indifference. "It is my job to discover how it is done. Your disbelief does not interest me."

You must match this man's calm,

Jarel told himself. Tennente is a dangerous man. "It is the disbelief of the commandant of the town of Adesta, Major. It is my duty to see that the public welfare is maintained in this region. I would hardly be so remiss in that duty as to allow a man to enter the country once a night with a truck filled with contraband arms."

Tennente shrugged, and the shrug seemed to imply many things, all of them unflattering. Jarel felt anger working in his mind like a strong liquor. Tennente placed his hand on the canvas bundle which yesterday he had opened for the colonel. "This is one of the guns. Last week the police shot the man who carried it. But there will be many guns and many men carrying them, unless Gomar is shot."

"Shot!" Jarel echoed, but not incredulously; like Gomar, he knew the major by reputation. "You can't shoot a man for transporting wine under license."

"Gomar is not a wine merchant. He is a gunrunner, and that is a capital offense."

Jarel pushed back his chair, stood up, and walked to the wall map. He put a short, plump finger on the town of Adesta, and then, by stretching himself, placed the other arm across the border into the Republic. "This is Gomar's route," he said. "He is first searched by the border guards of the Republic, and then, with his truck visible at all times to Bonares, he moves down the mountain road to

our hut. There he is searched a second time. Then he continues down into the town, always under the eyes of Bonares and anyone in the valley who cares to look up toward the mountains."

"Young Bonares," Tennente interrupted. "Do you trust him?"

"I trust him," Jarel said. "He is a bright lad. But I trust no one that much. I have made surprise checks. You have made one yourself. For that matter, the Republic guards have offered to let us assist them in their search."

"Yes," Tennente said. "If we give them sufficient warning."

Jarel, ignoring the major's qualification, turned away from the map. "You must see my position, Major. I have the greatest respect for the secret police, but I will not arrest a man without evidence."

Tennente stroked the shrouded rifle. "Here is your evidence, Colonel. It could only have come from this region. And only Gomar has used the pass."

"You believe the story of the arms-cache," Jarel said. "An old wives' tale fifteen years old. A story told in cafés by idlers."

"It is not merely a café story. It is a fact of history. The gun-cache exists, and in the mountains of Adesta." Tennente's eyes were veiled by their heavy hoods. "In the final days of the General's revolution —"

"War of liberation," Jarel corrected him automatically.

"Thank you. War of liberation. A

Government army, the only one to remain intact, moved to this region and crossed to the Republic. They were turned back, and so they returned to this region and into the power of the General. But they returned without their arms. Their arms were buried, either on this side of the pass or the other. And now Gomar has found a way of removing them." Tennente threw the rifle onto the desk. "Do you think I cannot recognize those arms, Colonel?"

"You should be able to," Jarel said.

"You were in one of the armies which fought the General."

"Just so," Tennente said courteously. Jarel had noticed that Tennente's infamous temper was his servant; it exploded only when he chose. "And this gun came from the mountains of Adesta."

"Then the guns come either from our side or from the Republic side. If from the Republic side, then Gomar must carry them past the Republic border patrol."

"That might not be difficult to do."

"And then he would have to get them past our guards, and that is difficult to do." Jarel stood with his back against the map. There was no reason why he should hold his temper; Tennente was hardly a man in political favor.

"Perhaps they come from our side," Tennente said.

Jarel tugged at the map-cord, and the mountains of Adesta shot upward and vanished. "Really, Major Ten-

nente. I am not as ignorant of the details of my command as you suggest." He walked to a steel filing-cabinet, rummaged through its disorder, and pulled out a wrinkled document. "I have read the report of the military commission, and I presume that you have, as well. Immediately after the revolution —"

"The war of liberation," Tennente said, his face bland.

"— the General sent a commission here. They built a border hut and then searched our side of the border." Jarel untied the red tape, opened the dossier, and extracted a map. It was similar to the one which Tennente had just seen disappear, save in one detail. Jarel placed his short, blunt finger on the border post. "Here is the hut they built," he said, "and here is how they searched. Inch by inch. Do you see these circles in red ink? Each circle represents a stage of search. They would have found a single pistol, had it been buried there." Jarel looked up at Tennente, who had been following him closely. "And now, if the guns exist at all, they are carried down the mountain in a truck which contains only wine. Does that make sense to you?"

"No, but it does not have to make sense, because it happens. You are like the mathematician who confronts the runner at the end of his race and proves to him that he could not have run as fast as he did." Tennente picked up the map, folded it, and slipped it in his tunic pocket.

"Major Tennente —"

"Colonel Jarel." Tennente stood up stiffly. "I did not come here to discuss the niceties of logical demonstration with you."

"Nevertheless, you will have a demonstration. Would you like to have Gomar arrested when he reaches the town tonight?"

"By no means. I am not interested in one load of arms. I am interested in discovering his source of supply and his means of transportation. And then; too, it might develop that tonight he will not be carrying arms."

Jarel walked up to him. "And why not, Major? Because he will be warned — is that what you mean?"

"I mean only that I will tell you when he is to be arrested and shot. Only that."

"And when that time comes, and if you are mistaken, I will press for a court-martial. I am not a man without friends."

"And I am a man without friends," Tennente said, "in your government." He pushed back his garrison cap and looked at Jarel. "You will not arrest without evidence, Colonel. That is rare in the General's country. I like that." He picked up the rifle, raised his hand in a sketchy parody of the General's salute, and left the room.

From the window, Jarel watched as Tennente walked painfully to his staff car, across the plaza. There is a man one could follow, he thought, and then corrected himself. There is a man one could have followed.

Perhaps twenty years ago, before Tennente had been drained of purpose. Before Jarel's wife had given birth to the two daughters who were now in a convent school at the capital. Before Jarel's body had run to fat and his mind to caution. He looked at a photograph of the General which hung on the opposite wall. Like himself, a plump man. A man who knew how to be safe, how to twist and turn. . . .

"You see," Lieutenant Bonares said, "on a clear afternoon like this, you can see the frontier post of the Republic clearly, and the people moving there in front of it. We could wave to each other if we wanted to, but we never do."

"No," Tennente said, as he stood beside the young man outside the border hut. "I can see that." He looked upward. "It will snow."

"It often does, up here, although it always remains warm in the town below. Here it is always quiet and there is always snow. I hate this place."

"Yes," Tennente said. "It is quiet. Myself, I like it."

"I am not your age, sir."

"No. That is so. It will take you many years to learn that life like this can be pleasant, or at least not ugly."

"In the cities," Bonares said, "there it is always pleasant, and promotions come quickly. One could be a colonel at forty, one could —" He caught his tongue and flushed through his olive skin at his bad manners.

"It is all right," Tennente said. "I have been a colonel. And once I was almost a general. When I was young I would not have liked this place. When I was young I was a fool." He walked over to his staff car, and his sergeant handed him a canvas-wrapped bundle. While the two border troopers outside the hut looked at the bundle with idle, bored curiosity, Tennente and the lieutenant went into the hut.

Tennente unwrapped the rifle and placed it on the table near the unwashed coffee cups of the morning.

"You asked if Gomar were smuggling guns," Tennente said. "He is. This is one of them. Pick it up. Examine it."

Bonares looked at it with a vague, professional interest and then replaced it.

Tennente slipped into a chair. "You have never seen this gun, or any like it?"

Bonares shook his head.

"No," Tennente said. "That is because you were too young. This model is no longer used in the army, and it is not a good gun, perhaps, because it lost a war."

"Major," Bonares said. "I have told you what I know, and I will help you if I can."

"Yes," Tennente said. His voice was even, but there was a tired edge to it. "I understand that. Perhaps I have come up here so that you can tell me what you do not know. The route is clear. You know it, and Jarel knows it, and I know it. But some-

thing happens on that route which only Gomar knows."

He reached in his pocket, pulled out the map, and unfolded it on the table, beside the rifle. Then he motioned to the lieutenant to sit beside him. He scratched the stubble on his chin. "I wish that I were the kind of officer your colonel is — all logic and crisp argument. When I was at the Academy, I was always poor at that. If I were such an officer, I could say, 'Don't you see, my dear colonel, it was done thus-and-so' — telling him exactly how. But instead I know only that it was done."

Bonares shook his head. "I wish I could tell you."

"The map and the rifle," Tennente said. "Logic and violence. What those two cannot do when they are joined. Together, they can make a revolution."

"A trickle of guns will not make a revolution," Bonares said self-consciously. He had been taught that politics are not a soldier's concern.

"In the country which the General rules?" Tennente asked. "There were enough guns in that arms-cache for a regiment. A gun will never stay buried, Lieutenant — never."

"He brings no guns to this post, Major. I swear it!"

Tennente ran his hand along the dull barrel of the rifle, and now the voice which spoke to the young officer was more quiet. "Once I wished that there were more of these weapons — in the days before this gun was buried, when the General's artillery

was rolling across the plains, when towns which contained not a single soldier were bombed and destroyed. You don't remember those days, Lieutenant. You were a little boy in school."

"I have heard the story."

"How proud we were then of the army of Adesta. The army which buried their arms rather than surrender them." He smiled. "And how pleased we were when the report of the commission made it clear that the arms were out of reach of the General."

"If one feels as you do," Bonares said, "why are you not still proud?"

Tennente looked at Bonares, who, frightened by his rudeness, dropped his eyes to the map. "Because I have come to hate violence and those who make use of it. I was proud that those guns could be used again. But not by Gomar." Tennente pushed back his chair and stood up. "Not by Gomar. I am not proud that the guns of my old army should be used to destroy my own country." He leaned forward. "Right in this pass, Lieutenant, our country is being betrayed."

"In this pass," Bonares said, his young clear eyes troubled. "I had not thought of it that way."

"And that is why I cannot use the fine logic of your colonel, who shows me circles on maps. Because the one man I hate even more than the General is carrying guns here. And I am going to stop him."

Bonares's hands were pressed so hard against the table that the tips

of his fingers were white. "I would help you if I could, Major."

"Though why I should stop this Gomar I do not know," Tennente said. "Nor for whom. For a fat General whose chief virtue is that he is only a little bit better than a totalitarian government? For a fat colonel who is afraid of a bad report? For a lieutenant who wants a pleasant post in the capital?" He walked to the window. "Perhaps I will stop him for the honor of an army whose members are scattered or dead and all betrayed."

It was beginning to snow, and the first flakes were falling slowly and noiselessly. "It must have been snowing that day," he said. "That day fifteen years ago. Over the pass an army moved up and then moved back. An army defeated, and honey-combed by men like Gomar. Now where is your logic, Lieutenant? That quality which Colonel Jarel values so highly. Tell me what you do not know." He glanced momentarily at Bonares, whose eyes were still fixed on the map.

"Logic is always helpful," Bonares said sententiously, without raising his eyes. "And ultimately it is always correct."

"Then how does he carry through his guns?" Tennente asked.

"How can I tell you what I do not know?" Bonares said, and then looked up. "I can tell you only that he does not carry guns to this post."

"Yet logic is always correct," Tennente said. "Ultimately." He turned

back to the window, and for an instant he saw imprinted on the retina of his imagination the long, weary columns of men moving backward, down the long steep road to the General's tribunals and concentration camps, and he felt that if he could sharpen the focus of his vision he would be able to see whether or not they still carried their arms. For Tennente knew that guns will not stay buried, nor violence stay hidden in the earth. He tried to look backward, fifteen years, to the clue which the present did not hold.

The snow was falling more swiftly now, and, as it did so, it wiped from Tennente's mind the picture which his tired imagination had conjured up. And in place of that picture was an idea, an implausible, improbable idea. An idea which was against all Jarel's logic, but which was really the only logical answer.

He turned. "Lieutenant, do you still wish to be of service to me?"

"In anything, Major."

"After you have searched Gomar's truck tonight, phone me. I will be at the hotel."

"Of course," Bonares said.

"I want to time him, to see how long it takes him to reach the town." He walked to the door. "If he comes tonight. It is snowing hard."

"He always comes," Bonares said, bitterly.

In the years before the first world war an attempt was made to establish Adesta as a resort town. They built a

large hotel at the edge of the town, fronting the valley, a hotel with a fine long marbled terrace from which one could look across the brief valley at the mountains. Here, for a few years, ladies from the capital sat with their parasols, sipping ices while the gentlemen strolled up and down, pretending that Adesta was Biarritz or Sorrento or Zurich. They would drive into Adesta in their open touring cars, swathed in dust-coats and mufflers, and stay for weeks. In those days, the neighboring Republic was a friendly land and there were no frontier guards. The visitors, on windless days, would drive up the narrow, twisting road and over the pass for picnics on the green warm meadows and then drive back in the cool evening for dancing on the terrace of the hotel. But the cold winds drove them away and the manager went bankrupt and sold the hotel to a native innkeeper. Now it was visibly decaying.

There were few servants now, and the pink stucco walls were unwashed. The expensive walnut bar had been replaced by one of zinc, about which the wine-growers and farmers would gather in the evening, discussing prices and the strange things which happened in the city. One wing of the hotel had been destroyed by artillery fire during the revolution and had not been replaced. The marble of the long terrace, which had once been the pride of its owner, was cracked and dirty now, and the tiny tables were unwashed.

It was late in the evening when Colonel Jarel joined Tennente on the terrace, although the major had been sitting there since twilight. Jarel sank into the tiny wicker chair beside Tennente. "There is a roadblock at the foot of the mountain now. Gomar will be stopped when he reaches it. It is all arranged as you suggested."

Tennente nodded. He was smoking, and the tiny glow of his cigar outlined the long, creased face.

"You may be right," Jarel said placatingly. "We will find out. It would be much to our credit if you were right."

"It does not matter," Tennente said.

"It matters. Of course it matters — if guns are being supplied."

"Here, there, everywhere . . . Did you ever have rats in your house, Jarel? You find their hole, and plug it up with cement, and sit back. You see no more rats. But they are there, moving delicately behind the woodwork, sounding out the weaknesses of the wood. They find a section which has been badly joined and they begin to gnaw. And soon there is another hole and you have to plug that one up."

"But you simply keep on plugging up the holes," Jarel said.

"Oh, yes. Unless you build strongly, with good wood."

A wind was beginning to rise, and now it blew gently across the terrace. Jarel, as he watched Tennente's motionless figure, shivered slightly. It is the wind, he thought.

"I can get into a great deal of trouble for what I am doing," Jarel said, "and I have always avoided trouble. But now I am not afraid."

"You will be," Tennente said. "Fear is in this country like malaria in a swamp."

"What are you afraid of?" Jarel asked.

Tennente pointed with his cigar. "There are Gomar's lights," he said. "He is coming to Bonares's hut." *I am afraid of nothing because I am a coward, he thought; I am not afraid because I have no hope.*

He drew in on his cigar, and then, to remain calm, he began to talk, while Jarel watched the lights of the truck, crawling like twin, malign insects, toward Bonares. "From the first there has been an impossibility. If the guns were on the Republic side, the guards would have discovered them: If they were on our side, the military commission would have discovered them fifteen years ago."

"Exactly."

"Exactly," Tennente repeated dryly.

"Bonares has stopped the truck," Jarel said. It would be simple, he thought, to phone and have the road-block removed. He looked nervously at Tennente; remembering what the major had said. *You will be afraid again.*

"And I thought that either the guards have been bribed to pass through the guns or else the commission did not do a good job. But the guards could not have been

bribed in that fashion, or they would have been trapped when we made our surprise inspections."

Tennente had been watching the tip of his cigar, but when Jarel said, "He has left Bonares," he looked up and watched the two small headlights move slowly down the mountain.

"And I had the report of the commission. They did not do a haphazard job. Building a hut, moving outward from the hut, inch by inch — this is not the method of bunglers."

The wind brushed across Jarel's face like a soft, impalpable leaf. "Bonares should have phoned."

"He will," Tennente said. "He will phone to tell you that Gomar brought no guns to the hut. And between these two facts I ran back and forth like a squirrel. Then, this afternoon, at the border hut, when I realized that Bonares found it impossible to lie, I had an idea which grew to a certainty." He smiled mirthlessly. "You know it is very cold up there, with snow and high winds for your companions." Then the wind, cutting down the path, swept across the terrace. It whipped up the dead brown leaves which were scattered on the terrace and pushed them against the tables. The wind shook the doors and windows of the decaying hotel. Somewhere inside, there was a sound of rotting wood being torn loose.

"I have never known the wind to be so high," Jarel said. "It makes the terrace dangerous."

"The building was not built strongly," Tennente said. "Pink

stucco and cheap marble." That is not the way to build — either a hotel or a nation. One built with honor and integrity, solid stone upon solid stone.

They sat in silence, as the lights approached the foot of the mountain. Presently Tennente, with a curious savagery, flung his cigar over the marbled rail of the terrace, and looked up toward the hut. "Something is wrong up there."

"No," Jarel said. "Bonares phoned me just before I came here."

Suddenly Tennente sat very still, but he said only, "Why?"

"He asked me to tell you that Gomar would carry no more guns down the mountain."

For a moment, only the sound of the wind and the driven leaves filled the terrace, and then Tennente said, "You are sure those were his exact words? No more guns will come down the mountain?"

"Quite sure," Jarel said, puzzled and very frightened.

A waiter came out and summoned Jarel to the phone. When he came back, he was sweating in the cold night air. "You were right, Major. Half of Gomar's casks contained guns, when the border troopers at the roadblock searched them." He looked across at the lights of the stopped car.

"Anything else?" Tennente asked.

"Yes," Jarel said. "The two border troopers rode down with him. The officer in charge of the roadblock has no explanation."

"They were trying to get away," Tennente said quietly. "They had helped Gomar shoot Bonares."

The two men — the one who understood and the one who did not — sat without speaking, until Jarel could no longer stand being alone with the wind and the gaunt man beside him. "Why?" he asked.

"Because honor is so strange and tenuous a thing," Tennente said. "Because it would allow Lieutenant Bonares to do a terrible thing but would not allow him to lie. Bonares was a good young man, but a naive one, and rather weak. We teach our young officers that they should know nothing of politics. It was so in my time too. Perhaps it is a good thing, perhaps a bad. He would have killed himself rather than be a traitor. But a little gunrunning now, a profitable and a dangerously romantic affair for a poor officer with no chance for promotion. And so he and the guards took Gomar's bribes. But he would not lie."

"When I went up to him today, I showed him a gun, and spoke to him, quite without purpose, of what that gun would mean in the possession of a traitor. And then we looked together at the map of the military commission. Slowly, I suppose, we realized together: I where the guns were hidden, and he what he had been doing. I noticed, in passing almost, that he would always answer my questions with a kind of formula: 'Gomar brings no guns to the hut.' Never did he say, 'Gomar will take

no guns away from the hut.' So, when I began to suspect this afternoon, I hoped, I prayed, that he would speak, but he did not. Now I know why. He planned to stop Gomar or be killed. His men were not so noble." Tennente shook his head. "It does not matter."

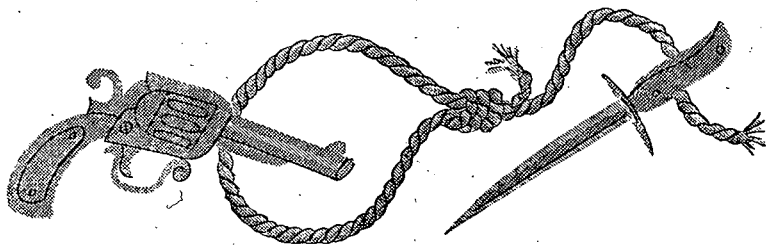
But Jarel said, "Where were the guns?"

"In the only place where the commission did *not* search. Buried deep in the earth *under* the hut — the hut built *before* the commission began to search. The guards were not bribed to pass the guns through, but to give them to Gomar. Each night he would drive to the Republic, pick up some casks of wine, then drive back to the hut, where the arms

casks would be carried up from their pit and loaded aboard. Then the floor planks of the hut would be replaced until the next night. Of course, when we came up, Gomar merely drove down with wine." Tennente smiled. "Logical demonstration," he said.

Jarel stood up. "We can't be sure what has happened at the hut. Perhaps they did not kill Bonares. Perhaps they —" But Tennente had closed his eyes.

The colonel stood up and walked across the terrace to the door, and then turned and looked back. Tennente had opened his eyes, but his back was half-turned to the decaying hotel. He was looking through the darkness to the mountains.



THE MYSTERY OF THE HALF-PAINTED HOUSE

by T. S. STRIBLING

TWENTY-FOUR ACACIA STREET IS naturally across from Twenty-three, where Poggioli and I live. It was a weathered, run-down house, its only prosperous-looking adjunct a royal palm in front. One day somebody started to paint the house an unhealthy yellow, but when he got about half through he broke off work. Poggioli and I expected him, day after day, to come back and finish the job. We finally began speculating on why he had stopped. I said, considering the color of the paint, that perhaps he had bought it as a remnant at some sale, at a very cheap price, and he hadn't bought enough. The sort of house it was, and the kind of man who would live in such a house, suggested a bargain hunter who would buy too little. And certainly he would never find another remnant to match the first one he had purchased. The original mixture must have been a lot of other remnants dumped together by some wholesale house.

One morning I stood on our stoop enjoying the sunshine in the beginning of the hurricane season and I saw a man come out of Twenty-four and start toward the bus stop. He hesitated on his way, and somewhat to my surprise, came across and asked if I were Mr. Poggioli. I told him I

wasn't; I was the man who wrote up Professor Poggioli's cases.

"Oh, he's a perffessor. Well, that explains it."

"Explains what?" I asked.

"Why, I heard he's a detective who would jest as soon he'p a criminal git away as he'p the police ketch him, but of course a perffessor would treat ever'body alike."

I drew breath to start a long explanation but I realized it would do no good. "How long have you lived here?" I asked with some vague notion of getting around to the puzzle of the paint.

The man drew a disappointed breath. "Not long. I come here to enjoy the advantages of a big city."

"Where did you come from?"

"Wackyjacky."

"Where is Wackyjacky?"

"Up Route Number 'leven, off State Road sixty-two, then county road thirty-four. You are right shore you ain't the perffessor?"

"You wanted to see him?"

"Well . . . no-o . . . not now."

Once more I gave up the point. As he continued simply standing there, in the fashion of folk from Wackyjacky, I had to say something else. It was one of those conversations which you had to start over again in order to bring it to a stop.

"Who you going to vote for — for the city council?" I asked.

"I'm goin' to vote for somebody who ain't on the council!" stated my neighbor belligerently.

"Sure," I agreed, "everybody does that, but the trouble is, when you vote for a man who is not on the council, and he gets elected, he becomes just a councilman like all the others. You see, it puts you back right where you started."

My visitor seemed surprised. "That is a fact, ain't it? I hadn't thought of that. There ort to be some way for us voters to express ourse'ves on that point, too."

"I don't suppose there is any way. The best we can do is to vote against all the candidates we know."

"Well, there's the bus. I gotta run."

"What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a barber." And he ran for his bus.

I mentioned the incident to Poggioli later. I said I had solved the paint problem on the house across the street. The man had bought a small amount of paint to retouch his barber pole, but it was the wrong color — so he had used it on his house.

Poggiolo didn't even bother to dismiss my theory. "Why did he cross the street and speak to you?"

"He thought I was you."

"I wonder what sort of trouble he was in."

"He said he had heard you would just as soon help a criminal as help the police."

"You didn't learn what he had done?"

"I wanted to find out about the paint, but couldn't quite direct the conversation. . . ."

"The paint," caught up Poggioli, "of course, the paint! I wonder what connection that could possibly have with crime?"

"Why, none," I said, "how could paint possibly . . ."

"I don't know. That was the point I was pondering."

I told Poggioli that if he wanted to see the barber for himself, he would probably find him at the political rally that evening — he seemed to me the sort of man who attended those affairs. Of course, the criminologist and I normally never went to such meetings. We were of the intellectual aristocratic class who have nothing to do with politics, and the results are very happy indeed, because it places such interesting men in charge of our public affairs. On account of our neighbor, however, we broke our rule and went along to the rally. And we immediately regretted it.

The rally was for Bill Hinckman, candidate to succeed himself on the city council. There were free hamburgers, hot dogs and coffee, a singer from the night clubs who had a night-club voice, and a local woman singer who had no voice at all. The price we paid for this food and entertainment was to listen to Bill Hinckman's account of how he had built up the city of Tiamara from nothing to whatever it was during his ten terms of

office, and how he was going to triple the capital and population if he were elected to another term.

Nobody really listened to the speaker. Nobody expected people to listen, not even Hinckman. The crowd blinked at the stars and the moon which had risen out of the sea and said, "Doesn't look like we're going to have a hurricane, does it?" Somebody else said, "I can't figure out how a hurricane blows a hundred miles an hour but don't travel but ten miles an hour." A man who claimed to understand this riddle explained it to everybody within hearing, all the while Hinckman was making his speech.

In the midst of this mental absenteeism somebody under the floodlights near the speaker's stand yelled out, "Hinckman, whyn't you quit throwing bouquets at yourself and give us the lowdown on the Sullivan Development Deal! Didn't Jack Spate slip you fifty grand to see it through?"

Instantly an outcry arose against the heckler. Everybody eating Hinckman's free hamburgers felt a certain loyalty towards him. Voices arose: "Kick that man out! Put Bud Simmons out of here! He ain't a Hinckman man, chase him!"

A movement stirred in the audience to do this and Mr. Simmons's voice arose in the tumult, insisting he had the right of free speech.

"Yes, but not while eatin' Bill Hinckman's chow! Simmons, you go over to Nick Howard's rally where you belong — don't come here tryin'

to break up our candidate's speech!"

Why they wanted it to go on when no one was listening was obscure, but they did. At this point Bill Hinckman himself lifted a generous and statesmanlike voice from the speaker's stand.

"Let the man say his say. If I've made a mistake, I want it brought out before my constituents. The only way I can ever hope to rise to finer and higher service is to listen to public criticism!"

A great roar of applause broke out at this. Mr. Hinckman waited in gratification until it died down and then resumed his account of how he had made Tiamara what it was. The crowd was about to return to its hot dogs and hamburgers when another voice, a subdued voice, asked the speaker a question.

The orator paused and leaned over. "How's that? A little louder, my friend."

The man had one of those voices which never seem to become audible in a crowd. Finally Hinckman understood and repeated the question aloud to satisfy the curiosity of his audience. "He wants me to have the city council make it illegal for men to shave themselves at home, or for one member of a family to cut another member's hair or give another member a permanent."

An outburst of laughter greeted this. Mr. Hinckman held up a restraining hand: "Don't laugh, don't make fun. Wisdom comes from many sources, my friends. One part of the

gentleman's suggestion is already a regulation in this city. Women are not allowed to give each other permanents. Of course, they still do, but it's against the city ordinances. This man evidently is a barber. He pays a license to run his shop; he pays state tax, county tax, and city tax to keep in business. So the state, county, and city owe him protection. Who's against him? Why, the plutocratic Northern safety-razor manufacturers — that's who's against him, that's who's ruining this honest man's trade! Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to back this man's request to the limit of my ability. Who will benefit? All of us. A shave by an old-fashioned straight razor in the hands of a barber is better, smoother, and more social than any hunting of harassed hairs by a half-clad man in a bathroom. Yes, I'm all for this gentleman's suggestion — for home industry! I'll back such a measure to the limit, even if I have to lose every vote in the precinct!"

More cheering and laughter. These two interruptions were all the crowd had heard of Mr. Hinckman's speech. A little later the refreshments gave out and the rally ended. A few local bigwigs came up to congratulate the speaker on his "effort." There is always that unconscious touch of realism in the praise of local men for their local politicians. They never congratulate their bellwether on his oration, but on his "effort."

On our way back to the apartment I sympathized with Hinckman for

being heckled by Bud Simmons about the Sullivan property deal. What made it particularly shameful was that every man at the rally knew that it was true. Hinckman had been in on that deal.

Poggioli said, "Do you think that Simmons really heckled Hinckman?"

I was amazed. "Why, I heard and saw him do it."

"But didn't you also hear Hinckman's answer?"

"Yes, very smooth — very urbane and statesmanlike."

"And what influence will that have on the voters?"

"Well . . . they thought Hinckman was a . . . a generous and tolerant man, passing over an insult like that."

"Let me analyze exactly what it will do. They all knew that Hinckman was in on the Sullivan deal and they all held it against him. But when they think of the Sullivan deal now, they will also think how generous and tolerant Hinckman is, for he has now attached those riders to the accusation against him."

"Just what are you getting at, Poggioli? The first thing I know, you'll be claiming Hinckman *asked* Simmons to heckle him."

"Surely you wouldn't think that."

I didn't know whether Poggioli was being sarcastic or not. I never know.

We got out of our jitney about two blocks from home and walked the rest of the way. The night was balmy, but the stars were faintly dim. A

slight breeze set from the North. The hurricane, when it finally came, would approach from the South or Southwest. Always there is a faint wind against a coming hurricane, as if it were trying to push the terror back.

At some distance ahead of us in the street moved a solitary man. He turned into Twenty-four, across from our house. Suddenly I spoke up: "That was our barber — he must have been the man who asked Hinckman to pass a law against home barbering."

"I wonder why he painted half his house, then quit," said Poggioli.

The coming of a hurricane is an interesting feature of Tiamara life. The newspapers print maps of its whereabouts and of its direction of travel for days before it arrives. All windows are boarded up. Everybody buys food that needs no cooking, because all during the storm the electricity will be shut off. The newspapers also print detailed directions of what to do: everyone must leave a window open on the lee side of your home so that your house will not explode when the low-pressure center of the hurricane arrives.

There is little use giving here a description of the storm that passed over us at last. It looked like a gray hurtling wall of wind which you could actually see, and it sounded like a banshee. You knew when night came, but not when it was day. The most sinister thing about it was the eye of the storm: its center — a dead calm which crept along at about ten

miles an hour. All the rest was a dizzy dance around this slowly moving calm. It was fatal to get into the eye of the storm, because the other arc of the hurricane, blowing in the opposite direction, would sweep you away. In the eye of one storm hundreds of motorists thought the hurricane was over and tried to get back to the city along the causeway from the strand; they were all blown into the sea. . . .

When this menacing calm surrounded us, Poggioli and I remained indoors. But a strange thing happened. Somewhere on the outside we heard a noise like the backfiring of a motor, and we wondered what insane man was driving a car in the eye of the storm. Sometime later, the eye passed over and the wind leaped at once to hurricane velocity, in the reverse direction from which it had just been blowing.

The next morning everything was over and the sun was shining. Sand drifts, blown from the beaches, choked the streets. Drifts of splintered glass lay in the business districts where shop windows had been shattered. Only one constructive thing had happened during the storm and that was a very odd one: Twenty-four Acacia Street, across from our apartment, had been completely painted!

Poggioli and I looked at it and decided that it must have been finished before the storm began, and that we simply had not noticed it before. That was all we could think.

After a big hurricane I, personally, have rather lean pickings. I mean in

the matter of crimes. Of course, there is looting in the wrecked stores and houses, but there are no great and impressive crimes. It is as if the violence of nature had abashed the violence of men. It was therefore with professional relief that I saw in our morning paper, on the third day after the storm, the headlines of a murder.

I unfolded my *Times*, then stopped dead. William J. Hinckman had been assassinated. The veteran councilman had been shot last night, on the way home from his office. He had died of three bullets from a Luger pistol. No clue. The paper said Bill Hinckman had many political and professional opponents, but never, so far as anyone knew, a personal enemy. All the municipal organizations would attend Hinckman's funeral. Services would be held at the First Church of Tiamara. Five councilmen and the Mayor would be pallbearers. The city police would furnish a guard of honor.

I took the paper in to Poggioli. I had seen Hinckman only once — at the political rally; but I felt as if I had lost a friend — someone who, if I were in trouble, would promise me anything.

I told Poggioli what I thought had happened: Hinckman had been shot by one of his political opponents.

"Not his personal enemy?"

"No, he had none."

"Then it ought to be easy to find the murderer."

"Why?"

"Because you have a complete list

of his opponents: Just look over the list, pick out the one who is interested in collecting guns, and arrest him for shooting Hinckman with his Luger."

"You are joking, Poggioli!" — for I never was sure when he was or wasn't.

"No, a prominent man who would shoot another prominent man with an old Luger pistol, a readily identifiable weapon, evidently expects to be found out and plans to clear himself with a shrewd lawyer. No, I would say some very wealthy man committed that murder — someone who can give his name and address to the police and laugh at the law."

That was an astonishing deduction just to come from a Luger. . . .

I expected Gebhardt of the *Times* to visit us and have a powwow with Poggioli over something or other he had discovered, but Gebhardt did not come. I mentioned the fact to Poggioli, saying, "You were right about a rich man committing the murder — the papers are going to hush it up."

"How do you figure that?" he asked, because Poggioli often shifts to the opposite view just as soon as I agree with him.

"Because Gebhardt hasn't come to see you. The papers don't want to know who killed Hinckman."

"That is something I hadn't thought of. . . . So it was a very wealthy man, a political opponent."

A moment later our doorbell rang.

Under the circumstances it gave me quite a start. "Gebhardt!" I said. "Now we'll get the undercover

story"—and I hurried to the door.

I opened the shutter with a question on my lips; then came to a stop. On the stoop was a man I had seen before but whose name slipped my memory. I shook his hand, invited him in, and told him I had just been thinking about him—I find that the best thing to say to anyone whose name I can't remember.

Our caller looked at me antagonistically. "So you believe I did it?"

"Why should I think that?" I said, groping for his identity.

"Because you were thinking about me."

Then I knew he was speaking of Hinckman's murder and must be the murderer—"a guilty conscience needs no accuser." At the same moment I suddenly remembered him. "No, no, I don't think that at all, Mr. Simmons. If you were the murderer you would never come to see Professor Poggioli."

"Why not?"

"Because he would prove you guilty. No, you would stay just as far away from Poggioli as you possibly could."

"Yes, I get your point. Now, could I see Mr. Poggioli?"

"Sure, come on in."

I went in with him and would have introduced him to Poggioli, but naturally Poggioli remembered him at once.

"You are the Mr. Simmons who made a few remarks at the political rally, and you have come to see me about the murder of your friend."

"Friend? Bill really was my friend, but why do you say he was my friend?"

"Because you heckled him the night of his rally."

Simmons drew a breath of great relief. "Well, I declare . . . so you saw through that. . . . Yes, we really were friends. Bill was worried about the Sullivan scandal. I said to him, I said, 'Bill, if you'll let me bring it up at one of your meetings and if you pass over it like the gentleman you are, it'll create a mighty good impression among the voters.'"

"So you've come to me to help find his murderer?"

"No, not that at all. You see, nobody else understands that my heckling at the rally was a friendly act. The people think Bill and I were enemies. So they've picked me to hang the murder on—I'm now out on bail. So I came here to ask you not to find Bill's murderer, but to prove I didn't do it."

Poggioli looked at our visitor. "Of all the ridiculous accusations . . ."

"Look here, why don't you go to the Chief of Police and tell him that my heckling was a favor to Bill?"

"No, if he didn't see that at once he never will. Do you have any other evidence of your friendship with Hinckman?"

"Well, ye-e-es, as a matter of fact I have."

"But you don't want to show it?"

"I'd rather not. . . . In fact, I won't show it no matter what they do to me."

"Then it involves others?"

"How did you know that?"

"Because you value this thing, whatever it is, more than you do your own life. That's bound to involve other men . . . or women."

"Men," said Simmons.

"We'll drop the point," said Poggioli.

"I don't mind telling you personally," said Mr. Simmons, "but I don't want it brought up before any court."

Poggioli lifted an agreeable hand and Mr. Simmons reached in his pocket and drew out a sheaf of papers. He riffled through them, selected one, and handed it to the criminologist. I moved about and looked over Poggioli's shoulder. It was a cancelled check marked *Paid*, made out to William J. Hinckman in the sum of \$56,784.16.

Poggioli studied the check. "You paid him this for his influence on the City Council. You made it this uneven amount to give it the appearance of some sort of ordinary business deal."

"Sure."

"But I understood at the political rally that you were backing Nick Howard?"

"I was and am, Mr. Poggioli. Here's my check to Nick." He flipped through and produced another cancelled check. "I always back all of 'em — all of 'em who can win. It's a fair and square deal — all the boys know about it. I tell 'em somebody's got to foot you boys' bills — might as

well be me. If each one of you goes out an' gets a different backer, most of the backers will have to lose; then the whole bunch of you will finally run out of angels. But if you all come to me, no matter who wins, I'll make it back. Next election, come to me and I'll back you all again."

"It sounds logical," said Poggioli.

"Sure, it's politics."

"Look here, putting these tokens of friendship aside, couldn't you prove an alibi for the night your friend was killed?"

"Oh, sure — easy."

"Then let's do that."

Mr. Simmons shook his head. "No, if I'd been willing to establish an alibi, my lawyer could have done that for me."

"Why do you object to an alibi?"

"Why, Mr. Poggioli, if I should bring into court the men I was with and prove where we were and what we were doing on the night of the murder, it would raise twice as much stink as the murder itself."

Poggioli nodded. "I see. I should have thought of that." He relapsed into reflection again. "Mr. Simmons, I see one slight chance of clearing you — if the court would accept it."

"What's that?"

"The Luger pistol the deceased was killed with. No man in your position, associating with men who use only tommyguns and the newest automatics, would use an old-fashioned Luger to . . ."

"Mr. Poggioli, I'm sorry, but I do own some Luger pistols."

"You do!"

"Yes, I'm a collector of guns. I have a few Lugers in my collection."

Poggioli thought this over. "All right," he said, "Hinckman was shot with a Luger and you own a few Lugers. We will simply exonerate you on those grounds."

"How're you going to do it?"

"Let's ride over to the police station and you'll see."

We walked outside, got into Simmons's car, and he directed his chauffeur to the police station. When we reached the place, Poggioli explained to Lieutenant Briggs of the homicide squad what he wanted. He wanted Briggs to go with us to the Simmons home, take all the Lugers in the Simmons collection, bring them back to headquarters, and test them ballistically against the bullets that killed Hinckman. If the test was negative, it would prove Simmons was not the murderer.

"He might have had still another Luger," protested Briggs.

"I keep a record of every Luger I buy," said Simmons.

"It's flimsy," said Briggs; "it's a negative proof."

"So's an alibi. Lieutenant, I thought of this plan and came straight to you with it from my own residence on Acacia Street. Simmons has had no chance to arrange or hide or change anything in his collection. If he had suggested the idea, I would agree it smelled of trickery. But it's my plan."

This impressed Briggs sufficiently

to get him into our car and go to Simmons's home. I won't pause to describe Simmons's collection of antique guns. Some of them had interesting histories. He had, for example, the gun that killed President McKinley, the old-fashioned forty-one caliber weapon that shot Theodore Roosevelt while he was making a speech — the time when, even with a bullet wound in him, he would not stop speaking.

He had three World War I Lugers in his collection, and these Briggs took back to headquarters to test ballistically. The Lieutenant was quite skeptical. As he loaded and fired the three guns, he said to Poggioli, "I'm doing this purely out of respect for you, Professor Poggioli. It won't serve any purpose at all." He took the three bullets and compared them with one of the missiles that killed Hinckman. "No purpose at all, Poggioli. No sane murderer is going to . . ." Here he stopped, looked up from his microscope at Poggioli and then at Simmons. "This gun did it," he said, touching the middle Luger.

Simmons stared at his own pistol. "This is one heck of a note!"

Poggioli, on the contrary, was delighted. For once in his life he showed enthusiasm. "This is magnificent! It's extraordinary luck. I don't believe in luck, I believe in logic, but do you generally have this kind of luck, Mr. Simmons?"

"Yes, it seems like I do," growled Simmons, looking at his gun.

Briggs interrupted. "Professor Poggoli, would you mind explaining to me, just as a friend, what the applause is all about?"

"Why, it's simple, Lieutenant. It establishes Simmons's innocence beyond question. Would any sane murderer bring his weapon to the police for examination?"

"But that's his pistol and it came out of his own collection!"

"Certainly it's his pistol, but if he had known it was the one that killed Hinckman, he wouldn't have brought it to you. It's a psychological proof, Lieutenant Briggs, and a very clear and simple one."

"Well . . . what happened?"

"The murderer, whoever he was, was a very clever man. He shot Hinckman and then wanted to hide his weapon. He knew that Simmons collected guns. So he simply sold it to Mr. Simmons! Of course, he did not foresee that Simmons would be suspected and that his guns would be tested ballistically. Nobody could have foreseen that. He thought he had buried his gun where it would never be suspected—in a rich man's gun collection. Only a very bad break in luck spoiled his scheme. Simmons himself was suspected of the murder. That's why I inquired of Simmons if he is habitually lucky. You see, luck has never been scientifically investigated. I thought I would take the lives of a hundred lucky men . . ."

"Wait just a moment, Professor Poggoli! Mr. Simmons here isn't completely out of danger because he

owns the gun that killed Hinckman."

"Practically, Lieutenant. Mr. Simmons, when did you buy this Luger?"

The politician referred to a list he had with him. "Why, only three days ago. That does confirm —"

"Wait a moment, gentlemen!" interrupted Briggs. "That's evidence for the jury—you needn't practice it before me. Now, Poggoli, no one could possibly have *made up* a defense like this . . . could they, Poggoli?"

"You have known me for a long time, Briggs. Have I ever made up anything?"

"No, you haven't, but Simmons is the wealthiest man you ever worked for, Poggoli. I'm speaking frankly, as a police officer."

The great criminologist was offended, as he had a right to be. His voice took on a different tone.

"Simmons, whom did you buy this Luger from?"

"I don't know the man."

"Complete stranger?"

"Not quite . . . I . . . I'm trying to think now. . . . I had seen him somewhere before, but I had never heard his name."

"You didn't ask his name?" suggested Briggs skeptically.

"Lieutenant Briggs, I never ask the name of anybody who is doing business with me."

"But you would have remembered his name if you had ever heard it?"

"Oh, yes, I never forget a name or a face."

"This man's face—you say you

had seen it before?" probed Poggoli.

"Yes, I'm sure I did."

"In one of your night clubs, possibly?"

"Mm — mm . . . no-o . . . no."

"Doesn't the face associate itself with anything at all in your mind?"

Mr. Simmons gave a single dry click of laughter. "Yes, it does, Mr. Poggoli."

"With what?"

"With Hinckman."

Poggoli thought that over, then said, "That is remembering in a kind of circle. You are in trouble over Hinckman; the man's face reminds you of Hinckman. That's what I would call a memory induced after the fact."

"Maybe so," agreed Simmons emphatically, "but it's all I can think of about this man."

"Well, the thing for me to do is to find that man," said Poggoli. "With your luck, Mr. Simmons — and I really must investigate this matter of luck — with your luck it won't be too hard to find him."

We were about to leave the police station when Briggs interrupted. "I'll just keep this middle Luger as evidence, Mr. Simmons."

"Certainly, certainly."

"And just wait a moment here until I can get in touch with Judge Abbott, to see if he wants to make your bail bond larger."

This meant that Simmons would not be able to leave police headquarters with us. He said, "Look here,

Mr. Poggoli, I know you can find that man."

"Certainly. In a pinch we can trace the ownership of the gun — it only goes back to the first World War." That, I thought, was whistling in the dark.

"Well, I have here another check, Mr. Poggoli. I know you don't usually accept fees for your services. You do it for . . . shall we say, for the sake of art? I, too, admire art and artists. So I want you to take this check, and if you have any pet art charity you'd like to help — say, the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York or the Boston Symphony Orchestra — they are all deserving charities and always in the red — you can give it to one of them."

We left Poggoli's wealthy client at the police station and his chauffeur drove us home. The chauffeur was blasé. He said, "Bud'll get out. He'll luck out somehow. If you need anything from me, Mr. Poggoli, ring up Pineapple 23001."

Mr. Simmons's man drove away. We stood looking at our drab thoroughfare. The only flourishing thing on it was the royal palm across the street. Then I noticed something else. "Look," I said, "the man who finished painting his house has moved out and left it."

Poggoli asked me how I knew. I pointed out that the window blinds were gone and the door looked permanently shut.

Poggoli began to make fun of me, as usual — a door looking perma-

nently shut! — but somehow it did look that way.

"You've got a better proof than that," said my friend. "That sign stuck on the palm — I imagine it's a *For Rent* card. So that's the answer: the man finished painting in order to rent his house."

"He was the owner," I said.

"No, he was only the tenant. The owner would have had to paint it all over at once to attract an occupant, but a tenant could have painted part of it, and lived in it; then when he wanted to sublease, he would be forced to finish the job."

I started walking over to see if Poggioli was right. "Why didn't he finish it in the first place?"

"That's the real mystery of this whole situation — the only mystery. A murder is never a mystery. It is committed because somebody hates somebody, or wants somebody out of the way. Exactly who did it is a problem, but it's no mystery. But this house — half-painted, then painted and deserted — that's a real mystery."

By this time we were across the street. Sure enough, the card on the palm was a *For Rent* sign. It was home-made, and read:

Anybody wanting to sublease this property inquire of B. Beshears, War Veterans Building, Wackyjacky. Directions how to get there. Take Number eleven to State road 62. Go west 34 mi. Take LaRue County Road 5. North ten and a half miles to Wackyjacky. First come first served.

Poggioli stood reading the sign

slowly, pulling at his bluish chin. "That's clearly our man," he said at length, "but I still don't see why he didn't finish painting his house in the first place."

I recovered from my shock. "Our man!" I cried. "What do you mean . . . our man!"

"The man who murdered Hinckman, of course."

"Why do you think he is . . . ?"

"Because he is a war veteran. He'd have a Luger that he brought back from Germany as a souvenir. . . . But why should he finish painting his house and then run off and leave it . . . and why did he first paint it halfway and then stop?"

"If he really is the murderer, he ran off because he committed the murder," I said.

"Very silly of him. If he had stayed here and had not written his Veterans Building address, I would never have suspected him."

"He didn't know . . ."

"No, certainly not . . . it's just a stroke of luck. Well, we've got to run over to Wackyjacky, look up Mr. Beshears, and find out why he painted half of his house and quit, then painted the other half and went away."

"Aren't you going to find out why he killed Hinckman?"

"I imagine that will come out, but it is not the important part of the mystery."

I could but admire the strict logic of Poggioli's brain. We called up Simmons's chauffeur at Pineapple

23001, and had him come and take us over to Wackyjacky, in LaRue County. Wackyjacky has two stores, a post office, a pool room, and the War Veterans Building. On the building was a home-made sign: *Temporary Barber Shop of B. Beshears*. Inside was another notice: *Shaves — 15 cts. Haircuts — 25 cts. Scalp treatment for falling hair, not guaranteed — 20 cts.*

Mr. Beshears was cutting a small boy's hair as we went in.

The boy twisted around and looked at us out of the corner of his eyes, but Mr. Beshears paid no attention to us. We sat down to wait. As I looked at his price list again, the thought came to me: if we were wise, we would get haircuts, not mention the murder, then turn around and go back to Tiamara. It seemed against the public welfare to arrest a barber who gave twenty-five cent haircuts for murdering a politician.

After a space Beshears noticed us and recognized me. "So you seen my notice on the palm!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I did. Those prices up there — are they your regular prices?"

"They are here. Of course they wasn't in Tiamara. You ain't allowed to charge low prices in Tiamara. You got to charge the standard high prices even if you kain't git no work at the high prices. I could 'a' done a big business in Tiamara at reasonable prices . . . but you-all come here to see about rentin' my house, you 'all are interested in that?"

"Yes, we are," said Poggioli. "Were you the one who painted it?"

The barber gave a snort of sardonic laughter. "An' did I have a time paintin' it. Got it half-done and they come up an' stopped me."

"Who?"

"Officers with city regulations. Said I couldn't use no blowgun paint bresh, hit painted too quick. I told him I had to paint quick, I had no time for a reg'lar bresh. I was a barber by trade. 'Then,' says he, 'you kain't paint atall.' 'Why kain't I paint atall?' says I. 'Because you ain't a painter by trade,' says he, 'it's aginst reguhlations.' 'Then what am I goin' to do about this job?' I ast. 'I haff to finish hit.' 'No, you don't,' says he, 'you haff to quit.' So I quit. But when I wanted to leave the city I knowed I'd never be able to sublease hit half-painted."

"I didn't have no money to har nobody, so I fin'ly painted her up myse'f, stuck up my sign an' come home."

"But when did you finish painting without anybody stopping you?" asked Poggioli.

"You'd never guess, gen'men, you'd never guess." Mr. Beshears made a pleased gesture with his scissors. "It was durin' the eye of the storm. Quiet as a lamb, not a soul stirrin', moon shinin'. I was born and brought up in this state. I knowed I had enough time in the eye of the storm to finish paintin'. I been in dozens of hurricanes. So I finished it up, stuck up my sign when the blow was over an' come home."

So that was the mystery of the

half-painted house. The whole thing was solved. I said, "Well, Poggioli, let's get twenty-five cent haircuts and go home."

But Poggioli said, "Why did you sell your Luger to Simmons?"

"Well, I had to have money to git home on. I inquired aroun' and found out he paid the best prices. I was broke. Y'see, they charge two dollars for a haircut in Tiamara but I didn't git many customers. They wasn't enough for all of us. It seemed to me the city needed another regulation; instead of stoppin' private paintin', stop private shavin'. Make it illegal for a man to shave his'e'f. Make him patronize his barber. . . ."

Poggioli suddenly remembered. "Oh, yes, you are the man who advocated such a law at Hinckman's rally?"

"Yeh, an' he promised he'd pass it for me. . . ."

"Then why did you take your Luger and kill him?"

Mr. Beshears stopped clipping the boy's head.

"You ast me that?"

"Yes, I ask you that. Why?"

"I'll tell you. I thought Hinckman was goin' to pass that reguhlation for me. I mentioned it to some of my barber frien's. They laughed at me just like the crowd laughed at me. Then I knowed he was one of them politicians that wasn't goin' to do nothin' he promised and do ever'thing he didn't promise. It made me mad. He had made all kinds of reguhlations against me and none for me. I couldn't paint my house. I couldn't reduce my prices on haircuts and shaves in Tiamara low enough to git no work, reducin' wasn't allowed. I had to starve on two-dollar haircuts where I could have lived on fifty-cent uns. I decided to sell my Luger — it was all I had left — and go home, but I decided to use it first jest as an American citizen's protest against city politicians." He came to a close, resumed his clipping on the small boy's head. "What are you-all goin' to do about it?"

"Well, as for me, Mr. Beshears," said Poggioli, "I'm going to mail a certain check to the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York City . . . but first I'll take a haircut."

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In making his nominations for "the ten best active mystery writers," in the international poll conducted by EQMM last year, Edmund Crispin cast a vote for H. C. Bailey, and he gave the following reason for considering Mr. Bailey one of the ten best: "for creating, in Reggie Fortune, the most vivid detective character since Sherlock Holmes." Mr. Crispin's reason is "the soul of wit" — and extraordinarily perceptive . . .

THE AFFAIR OF THE ZODIACS

by H. C. BAILEY

IT WAS SPRING. EVEN IN WHITEHALL the sun was shining. Mr. Fortune looked up at it morosely and climbed into a taxi and was jolted away to that one of his clubs which most resembles a mausoleum. In the gloom of its hall as many as three venerable forms were watching the tape machine. Mr. Fortune gazed at them with horror, and sought the most sepulchral room in the club.

It is at the top, it is low, its small Victorianly curtained windows maintain a stubborn defensive against light and air, it has sullen furniture, and its drab walls are pitted with portraits of members completely dead. The others use it little. It was empty but for a bearded bishop audibly eating buttered toast.

Mr. Fortune took a remote corner with a monograph on extinct worms and surrendered to his emotions. He believes himself to love the country. He is a gardener of standing. But for the tedious affair of the poison in the Home Secretary's Easter eggs he

would have been in the company of hawthorn and lilac, enjoying his sympathy of iris. He disliked life.

The room became even darker. The chimney moaned. Rain and hail rattled on the windows. Mr. Fortune laid down the treatise on ancient worms and stared out at the storm. The melancholy of his round pink face was thus displayed. Sir Marmaduke Jones opened the door. He is the most fashionable of women's doctors, looks like it, dresses like it, walks like it. He was sprightly with the bishop, who mumbled. His tripping splendor crossed the room.

"Hallo, Fortune!"

"When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat," Mr. Fortune murmured, watching the rain.

"Have you been buying Zodiacs?"

Mr. Fortune turned to him with sad eyes. "What are Zodiacs?" he moaned.

"How innocently he says it! I thought you knew everything, Fortune." Sir Marmaduke sniffed.

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"No. No. I'm not a physician. Tell me about Zodiacs. They sound horrid."

And Sir Marmaduke sat down and told him. Zodiacs were a mine in Kurdistan. Lord Blancapel's latest. Platinum. Went off with a great boom. Blancapel's name was enough, of course. The best people went into it. People behind the scenes, you know, said there was absolutely no limit. But a week or two ago the shares took a turn. Nobody knew why. One couldn't hear of anything definite. But they had been jumping up and down and lately there was something very like a slump. Quite a sensation. Nothing like it ever known in Blancapel's mines. Very sound man, Blancapel, safe as the Bank. Queer things, these panics. . . .

Mr. Fortune moaned gently. Mr. Fortune looked out of the window. "It is a beastly day," he said.

"Spring, spring," Sir Marmaduke chirruped. "April showers bring forth May flowers, eh?"

Mr. Fortune stared despair of his intellect. "It'll bring down all the blossom," he said, and fled and drove home through another shower.

That was his introduction to The Affair of the Zodiacs. . . .

His next scene in it was set in the private view of the Academy of Art. He was still out of luck, he could meet nobody but dreary important people; he was meditating the desperate resort of looking at the pictures when Lady Dolly Pendeen bumped into him. She looks like Little Bo-

peep, and by the testimony of her friends ought to have been a jockey.

"So sorry," says she over her small shoulder. "Oh, it's Mr. Fortune."

"Yes. That's not my fault," he sighed.

She looked up at him with her head on one side. "Are you in Zodiacs, Mr. Fortune?"

"Heaven forbid."

"Praise God. Aren't we pious? I say, you're a wonder. Every blessed man here is talking Zodiacs."

"I always was an outsider," said Mr. Fortune sadly.

"Rats," said Lady Dolly. "What put you off? Haven't you any use for Blanco?"

"Blanco?"

"Old Blancapel. Look at them buzzing round him, flies on the jam."

Mr. Fortune saw a little bald man of sandy texture who resembled his tailor. But Lord Blancapel was less talkative. He had the manner of a bored potentate receiving homage. There was plenty of it. He moved on slowly, masterful, with a word or a gesture for those whom he chose to honor. His tired eyes lingered a moment on Dolly Pendeen and Mr. Fortune. In the next moment one of the most respectable of England's politicians was presenting Mr. Fortune to the great man and explaining who he was. Lord Blancapel said that the pictures were good that year.

"Yes. Yes. They always are," said Mr. Fortune wearily.

"I think so," the great man pronounced and passed on.

"Quite like royalty," Mr. Fortune murmured to Dolly Pendeen, but she was gone. He went too.

On the next day he was in the Central Criminal Court assisting the typist who poisoned the Easter eggs to prison. As he came out to streets drenched with spring rain a newsboy howled in his ear. He recoiled shuddering, he rejected the paper thrust upon him, he hurried to his car. Driving home, he read on every placard the substance of that raucous yell: *Death of Arthur Bure — Mr. Bure Found Dead.*

Arrived at his door, he sought enlightenment from the chauffeur: "Sam, who was the late Mr. Bure?"

"I been wondering myself, sir," the chauffeur grinned.

"We're so innocent," Mr. Fortune murmured. "Get me all the papers."

Thus he came into the middle of the case. The papers explained to him that Arthur Bure was a great financier. Mr. Bure was a director in all the companies which flew the Blancapfel flag, vice-president of the grand Blancapfel Combine, managing director of "the new money-maker, Zodiacs." And Mr. Bure had been found dead on Barton Heath. That was all.

Barton Heath is a large tract of upland common a dozen miles out of London, and about it is what real-estate agents describe as an "exclusive residential district." A book of reference provided the information that Mr. Bure's home was there.

It did not seem to Reggie a case requiring the expert mind.

As he went yawning to dress for dinner, his parlormaid presented him with another batch of evening papers. "The late editions, sir. Samuel said you ought to have them at once." Mr. Fortune with sad surprise said that it was very good of Samuel.

Death of Arthur Bure.

Big Slump in Zodiacs.

The headlines assaulted his eyes. "Oh, ah. Yes. I hadn't thought of that," he murmured. He read the papers in his bath.

They had not much more to tell about the death of Arthur Bure. A breeder of Sealyhams exercising her dogs had found a man's body on Barton Heath and informed the police. It was at once identified as Mr. Arthur Bure. Mr. Bure had been enjoying his usual excellent health and the news of his death had caused great surprise and regret in the district. The police were anxious to hear from anyone who had seen him out that morning.

So the report ran, carefully conventional. The space necessary to do honor to the event was filled up with Mr. Bure's financial glories and his house and his philanthropy. The other half of front pages was given to the slump in Zodiacs. For some days before Mr. Bure's death they had been tumbling down. When the news was whispered into the Stock Exchange that afternoon they crashed.

"Yah," said Reggie Fortune, and came back to the bald narrative of the death. "Yes. We're being very dis-

creet. I wonder." He gazed at those twin headlines. *Death of Arthur Bure. Big Slump in Zodiacs.* "Yes. Every effect implies a cause. But you do want to know which is which. This is kind of circular."

He came out of his bath and went to dinner with his sister.

The morning papers had nothing more to say, but something to leave out. The announcement that the police were anxious to hear from anyone who had seen Mr. Bure out walking was eliminated. In discussing the case, which he ranks as rather *recherché*, Reggie Fortune is wont to say that this was the first thing about it which interested him. He ate his omelette pensively.

He was in the marmalade stage, when a card was brought to him: *Mr. Franklin Lee, Universal Club.* The name meant nothing, the club less. The man who was shown into the consulting room was large and lean and loose-made. He looked as if he had slept in his clothes, but was clean and shaven. The brown, bony face declared that he was a nasty fellow to cross. He had an unquiet eye.

"You are Mr. Fortune? I want to consult you."

"I'm not in ordinary practice, you know."

"Medical expert, aren't you?"

"Well, that's one way of putting it. Did anyone send you to me?"

For a moment the man hesitated. "No, sir. Doesn't matter, does it? Heard about you from the papers. You have all the big cases. I want you

to take up a case for me. I'd like your opinion —"

"One moment. Have you seen a solicitor, Mr. Lee?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know, I'm not a lawyer. Your solicitor could tell you whether you'd better come to me."

"I know what I want."

"Yes. Yes. But I might only be able to give you something else." Reggie watched the restless eyes. "A solicitor would let you know whether it's a civil case or criminal."

"I'm not a criminal," the man roared.

Reggie leaned back in his chair. "Now, we're talking about cases, Mr. Lee," he said mildly. "In a criminal case, I may have to advise the Public Prosecutor. So I can't hear the other side."

Mr. Lee started up. "You've been got at already, have you? I was a fool to come." He took a step nearer Reggie, his truculent chin came out. "You're for the prosecution, so you can't hear the other side?" He laughed. "That's pretty good, Mr. Fortune." He stamped out.

Reggie Fortune sank down in his chair. "Your trick, I think," he murmured. "You play a dashin' game, Mr. Lee."

"Beg your pardon, sir" — a fluttered parlormaid entered — "the gentleman went off without his stick."

Reggie took an aged nobbly black-thorn and handled it carefully. It had white mud about the ferrule. Its other end was broad and heavy.

"He would have gone off without his head if he'd brought it," Reggie complained.

He took a cab to Scotland Yard.

The Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department looked up at him from a report in several pages.

"Hallo, Lomas, doing work?"

"We are always pleased to see you, Reginald. Is this a friendly call or have you something on your mind?"

"Well, I don't quite know," said Mr. Fortune, and Lomas put up his eyeglass. "What have you been doing with the Bure case?"

"What in the world do you know about the Bure case?"

"Nothing. Nothing. Been rather careful about that, haven't you?"

"This tone is very painful, Reginald. What's the matter?"

"Well, you know, I did think you were being rather coy."

"My dear Reginald. Are you feeling neglected? I'm afraid there's nothing in it for you."

"Yes. Yes. I thought that was what you were trying to convey."

"You know, this isn't like you," said Lomas. "What's the grievance?"

"Officially, no grievance. But speaking as a simple citizen, I think the police are practising economy of truth."

"Let me know what you mean."

"Well, this fellow's found dead. Seems to be a death of some public interest. Anything about how he died and why he died is kept out of the papers. In the evening the police want to know who saw him last. In the morning they don't. And no ex-

planations. And the Stock Exchange goes ramping on. The simple citizen says the Bure case is being handled."

"You mean it looks as if evidence was being hushed up for the sake of the gamble in Zodiacs?"

"It's a wicked world, Lomas."

"Thank you, I've been here some time," said the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department. "I didn't suppose we should get through this without people talking nonsense. It's a perfectly straight case. It's been handled quite correctly. I was just reading the reports from Barton Heath. I shouldn't have done anything different myself. We can't consider the Stock Exchange. A man is found dead; our business is to find out if it was a natural death and, if it wasn't, to get hold of the murderer. The inspector down there didn't choose to give anything away. He was perfectly right."

"It wasn't a natural death, then?"

Lomas turned the pages of the report. "Fractured skull—injury to the brain," he smiled. "Doesn't sound very natural, Reginald."

"No. No. Who's the doctor?"

"Oh, my dear fellow! These professional jealousies! Bure's own doctor and the divisional surgeon have both examined him. I suppose they would both know a fractured skull."

"Yes, it is an emphatic sort of thing. And why does Mr. Bure get his skull fractured to help on the slump in Zodiacs?"

"I don't know anything about Zodiacs," Lomas frowned.

"But Mr. Bure did?"

"What are you suggesting, Fortune? The police action is absolutely regular. When the inspector heard of the death he wanted to find out if anybody had seen Bure on his last walk. So he told the reporters to say so in the papers. When he got to work he found out that a man came to call on Bure that morning and went with him when Bure went out for the last time. Well, he couldn't put his hand on the fellow, he didn't want to warn him that he was suspected, so he told the papers to drop the notice about wanting witnesses and kept it dark that the police suspected foul play."

"Well-meaning man. Did it all for the best. But I don't follow the workings of his mind. If Bure's companion smashed Bure's head in, he won't believe the police haven't noticed it. Bein' so coy only tells him to look out for himself."

"Don't worry," Lomas smiled. "We know all about him."

"I wonder," Reggie murmured.

Into the room came Superintendent Bell, hasty and happy. "We're in touch with him, sir."

"Good. Have him summoned to the inquest and don't lose sight of him."

"Good morning, Bell," said Reggie. "How is Mr. Franklin Lee feeling?"

Bell's face expanded in a broad, paternal smile. He looked at his chief and chuckled. "Now how the devil did you know that?" Lomas cried.

"Not second sight. Just luck."

"Any particular kind of luck?" said Lomas unpleasantly. "I hope I don't intrude, Reginald — but have you been doing something in Zodiacs?"

"No. No. I was born of poor but pious parents. Also I have no head for gambling. I can't count. But thanks for kind inquiries. So Mr. Franklin Lee is in Zodiacs, is he?"

"You'd better ask him."

"No, I don't think so. I'm afraid he isn't loving me. You see, he called on me this morning and asked me to take up his case."

"The deuce he did!"

"Yes, that was rather my feeling."

"Did he tell you what he'd done?"

"I didn't ask him. I said we hadn't been introduced. He said he wasn't a criminal and quit."

"What did you make of him?"

Reggie reached for a cigar. "We didn't get on, you know," he said carefully. "Not what you'd call tactful." Smoke grew about him. "Rather an absent-minded beggar, our Mr. Franklin Lee."

"Rattled, is he, sir?" said Bell.

"Yes. That was indicated."

"They tell me he's powerfully made," said Lomas. "Rather violent in his manner? Nasty temper?"

"Well, he didn't like me. He's a big chap, yes."

"It all fits, doesn't it, sir?" said Bell.

"Yes. He fits. Physically. But if he did it why consult me?"

Bell laughed. "That's an easy one, sir. So that he shouldn't have you against him."

"I wonder," said Mr. Fortune. "You know, Lomas, if he thought I could make something of the case for him, I think I'd better have a look at it for you."

"It's a queer business," Lomas frowned. "The case seems straight enough. Come and hear what he has to say at the inquest."

Mr. Fortune went away confirmed in his opinion that the police were being coy. He did not say so. He suspected Lomas of nothing worse than an excessive discretion.

And the slump in Zodiacs stopped. On the day after Mr. Bure's death they had been ten a penny and no buyers. Then it was suddenly discovered there was a market, the price jumped, checked, wavered, and slowly climbed. As Reggie Fortune drove down to Barton with Lomas for the inquest he remarked on this. "It is infernally queer," Lomas growled. "Bure's death seems to have pulled the concern together again."

"Why?" said Reggie.

"Good Gad, I don't know. If it had smashed them, I could have understood it."

"Oh, could you? But they were slumping before Bure died; slumping good and hard. It wasn't necessary to kill him to knock 'em down. And, in fact, him bein' advertised dead up they go."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. Same like you. I don't know anything. But I don't believe anything either. A hearty, comprehensive incredulity. You

should try it, Lomas. Very stimulating to the intellect."

"I daresay. I have to believe evidence."

"Oh, my aunt!" said Reggie. "Evidence! Where is it?"

"You're going to hear it. Have you made up your mind it isn't true beforehand?"

Reggie stared at him. "Not your usual kindly self, Lomas."

"I don't like your tone. I know it's a nasty case. You might take it our hands are clean."

"My dear fellow!"

"All right. I don't mean to have the police dragged through Stock Exchange mud, that's all."

"Oh, my Lomas!" Reggie sighed. "Mr. Lomas, his theory of the force. What are the police for? Why, to keep out of the mud."

"Many thanks. You needn't be so infernally superior. You know what we're up against. You've had Franklin Lee trying to tamper with you already."

"Tamper! Well, well. You should have been there. He tampers like a rhinoceros." But Lomas withdrew from the conversation.

The little coroner's court was crowded with reporters. The coroner, enjoying his brief hour of fame, prolonged the formalities pompously, and Lomas and Reggie, close compressed, found fellowship again in affliction. At last Mr. Bure's butler was in the box: to identify the dead man as his master; to relate that a gentleman giving his name as Frank-

lin Lee called on his master on the morning of the death, about noon, and went out with him. "They didn't come back, sir. Mr. Bure never came back."

Amelia Fison, breeder of dogs, was walking on the heath in the afternoon, some time between the showers, about half-past two. Her dogs found a man's body. She recognized Mr. Bure. He seemed quite dead. She found a policeman and he telephoned. Did Miss Fison notice anything about the body? "Well, he was dead. He was all wet."

Reggie Fortune stirred, a thing impossible without disturbing Lomas, who glanced at him and saw on his round pink face a mild excitement.

Dr. John Smith came into the box, a plump man with a large important manner and a turn for oratory. Mr. Arthur Bure was one of his patients. Mr. Bure was a man of sixty, enjoying excellent health. In every way a first-class life. When he reached the body, Mr. Bure had already been dead an hour or two. Impossible to be more precise. The resources of medical science . . .

Reggie Fortune groaned.

The body was lying on its back. There was a large lacerated wound on the head at the juncture of the occipital with the parietal bones. The skull was fractured. About the left ear and on the neck below, the flesh was swollen and bruised. There were no other injuries. He had made a post-mortem examination with Dr. Keir. He came to the conclusion that

the cause of death was injury to the brain, inflicted by a violent blow from some blunt instrument, such as a heavy stick.

Reggie Fortune leaned back and his hand tapped lightly on his knee as he watched Dr. Smith's exit.

Dr. James Keir, divisional surgeon, brisk and snappy, had examined the body with Dr. Smith. Came to the same conclusion. Cause of death, blow from blunt weapon, dealt by powerful man.

Lomas looked at Mr. Fortune, but on that plump and boyish face saw only the stare of a vacant mind.

The powerful man came into the box. At the name of Franklin Lee the packed court rustled and murmured. His sallow face darkened, he put his hands in his pockets and stood slouching and grinning.

A fat solicitor cleared his throat. He appeared for Mr. Franklin Lee. Mr. Lee desired to give every information. The coroner bowed. "Why did you go to Mr. Bure's house, Mr. Lee?"

"He asked me to."

"That is important. Have you any proof of that?" A letter was produced. "But this asks you to his office in the City last week."

"I know. I went. He wanted to do a deal. We never got near terms. So he asked me to come down to his place and go into the whole business."

"But you have no record of that invitation?"

"Let's get this right. I'm just home from Kurdistan. I've got a concession

there that makes the Blancapel Zodiacs Company look silly. Bure knew that. He had to get hold of me or Zodiacs were bust. But he was a good little bluffer. He thought he could bluff me."

Another solicitor bobbed up in the middle of that. Representing Mr. Bure's executors, he objected. "Please, please," the coroner swelled. "No financial advertisements, Mr. Lee. Your point is you had something to sell to Mr. Bure."

"No, sir. I had something Bure wanted to buy. I might have sold if he had bid a price. I had him in my hip pocket. He knew that, but he didn't know I knew it. He never got near my figure."

Again the solicitor was up. It must not go out that this was the fact.

"What we have to deal with is Mr. Lee's statement that he came down at Mr. Bure's request," said the coroner.

"Yes, sir. It will be denied. I have witnesses to say he pressed himself on Mr. Bure."

Lee laughed. "That's the Blancapel game, is it? Now we know."

"I can't have this," the coroner frowned. "You are doing yourself no good, Mr. Lee."

"All right. Keep him quiet, then. Well, I came down to see the little man. I daresay I was a fool, but I thought we might have done a deal after all. The bottom was dropping out of his Zodiacs. It was worth anything to him to get hold of me. But he couldn't think big. He was still trying to bluff me with nothing in

his hand. So I told him he was wasting my time. He was badly rattled. He tried to keep me and when he couldn't he came out with me. I had him walking with me across the heath to the station talking nineteen to the dozen. I told him to go to the devil, and left him. That's the last I saw of Mr. Bure — standing on the heath."

"You left him alive?"

"I did. I never touched him."

"But you had a quarrel?"

"I don't call it a quarrel. Bure did all the talking. I only said, 'Nothing doing.'"

"You told him to go to the devil?"

"Oh, I was fed up with him at last, yes."

"I see. Had you a stick with you?"

Lee hesitated. "I daresay."

"What sort of a stick?"

"Ordinary walking stick."

"Do you produce it?"

"No. I haven't got it. I must have left it somewhere."

"Where?"

"Haven't a notion."

"That is unfortunate. Do you wish to add anything, Mr. Lee?"

"I've told you all I know." He left the witness box in a heavy silence.

The solicitor of Mr. Bure's executors arose and coughed. Grave statements had been made attacking the deceased which would be absolutely denied — several witnesses — important evidence. The coroner thought it obviously necessary to adjourn. The solicitor wished to refute the charges without delay. Large interests were affected. The coroner

had nothing whatever to do with that.

But while they talked, Mr. Fortune touched Lomas and rose and slipped out of the court. Lomas found him in the lobby. "What is it, Reginald?"

"I must examine Bure's body. I'll come down tomorrow."

"My dear fellow, how can I bring you in now? These doctors are absolutely confident. Their evidence was quite clear and definite."

"I said 'must,' Lomas."

Lomas and he examined each other's eyes. Lomas went back into the court.

When he came out again, Reggie was sitting in the car behind a long cigar. "How can you smoke with your eyes shut?" Lomas complained.

"You've noticed that's unusual? What a gift is the power of observation, Lomas! And how rare!"

"I've noticed you do it when you are at a loss."

"Not at a loss, no. Only wondering. When I have all the facts I may be at a loss."

"That's very gratifying. Do you mean to say I had to interfere and set these fellows' backs up because you were merely wondering?"

"No, not merely. There were points."

"Good Gad! If it's any consolation to you, you have made two hearty enemies. These doctors want your blood. Dr. John Smith means to be quite nasty with you."

"I wonder," Reggie murmured.

"Damme, Fortune, you're making

my position rather difficult. I've shown a good deal of confidence in you. The last thing I wanted to do was to take sides in the case. And now on your bare word, without a single reason, I've told these doctors the police aren't satisfied with their evidence. But we can't go on like this. It's time you showed a little confidence in me."

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! I do. I have. Absolutely."

"What is it you suspect?"

"Well, you know they don't persuade me. I feel a certain economy of truth, Lomas old thing. An elimination of facts."

"You think these doctors are trumping up a case?"

"I wouldn't say that. They may be right. But I know they're jumping to a conclusion. Several little things they didn't go into."

"For instance?"

"Well, where was his hat? If I thought a man had been knocked on the head, I should want to look at his hat."

"It may have fallen off before he was hit. We have to assume there was a struggle."

"Yes, that's the kind of logic that makes me uncomfortable. What I assume is that his hat wasn't damaged. That tells against their theory and they ought to have mentioned it."

"For what it's worth," Lomas shrugged. "There are half a dozen answers: it blew off, it fell off, it was knocked off before the fatal blow.

The point is, they found the man's skull smashed. You don't doubt that?"

"No. No. But you'll have to produce the hat."

"Anything else?"

Mr. Fortune smiled. "Well, I want to have a little talk with the Air Ministry."

"The — the Air Ministry?" Lomas repeated. "Good Gad, you don't suppose the man's death was seen from an airplane?"

"I hadn't thought of that," said Reggie in a low solemn voice. "My dear Lomas, you do have ideas. You really do. No. I wasn't going to ask about airplanes. Only the weather. In these days the Air Ministry looks after the weather for us. They ought to be able to tell us what the weather was doing on Barton Heath while Mr. Bure was out."

"What on earth has the weather got to do with it?"

"My dear chap! But you heard Miss Fison's evidence. She said she went out between the showers. She said when she found Bure he was all wet. Seemed to strike her. It struck me."

"Why, what's the matter with that? I don't see the point."

Mr. Fortune did not answer for a moment. "No, nobody cared about his being wet," he said sadly. "Things did get eliminated." He paused again, regarding Lomas pensively. "Well — there's the little matter of time. When did those showers break? If it was looking like heavy showers when

Lee left Bure's house, it's still more queer Bure went with him."

"More queer?"

Mr. Fortune looked at him with half-shut eyes. "Why did Bure go with him, Lomas?"

"Bure was worried about this Zodiacs slump. Lee was somehow mixed up in it. Take Lee's own story, he had a concession to sell which would have been very useful to Zodiacs. They couldn't come to terms. Lee went off in a rage. Bure hurried after him to have another try. They wouldn't be thinking about umbrellas. Then Lee lost his temper, hit him, and left him in the rain."

Mr. Fortune lay back looking up.

"Well," said Lomas triumphantly, "what's the matter with that?"

"It's all right. But it's going to be denied, you know. You assume Bure was mighty keen to get hold of Lee. Bure's solicitors are bringing evidence that he wasn't. Their story is Lee was worrying him. If you can tell me why a man of sixty, who doesn't want to be worried, goes out on a stormy day running after the man who worried him, I'll be very interested."

"Oh, Lord, I don't suppose we are going to hear the truth about Zodiacs," Lomas laughed. "All that stuff is bluff for the Stock Exchange. I daresay Bure did want to get hold of Lee. What then? He wouldn't pay the price, as Lee admitted. Lee lost his temper as he also admitted — and Bure went out. What do you say to that?"

"It's an hypothesis."

"With evidence," Lomas smiled. "You know, you're rather capricious about evidence, Reginald. You don't like it when the doctors ignore Bure's hat. But you're rather ignoring Lee's stick. The stick that he conveniently lost."

"His stick? Oh, I know all about that. He left it in my house."

Lomas sat up. "Did he though? You didn't happen to mention it."

"I didn't know it was relevant."

Lomas smiled. "These little errors do occur, don't they? Is it the sort of stick that could crack a man's skull?"

"Yes. I think so."

"You'll produce it, of course?"

"I've got it all right. He didn't come back for it."

"And that's very interesting, isn't it?" Lomas laughed.

The car was driving through London. Reggie leaned forward and told the chauffeur to stop at the next newspaper boy. He bought a paper and studied it. "Good heavens, you don't want to read the report of the inquest?"

"No. No. Latest prices." He pointed to the figures of Zodiacs. "Another little point that's ignored, Lomas. Why does the inquest on Mr. Bure send Zodiacs up?"

"It is a filthy case," said Lomas.

"Lots of mud about," Reggie agreed cheerfully.

This did not comfort Lomas, nor even conciliate him. He refused to go and eat muffins at the dowdy club which has the best in London. He

said morosely that he had work to do, and entered Scotland Yard. So Reggie Fortune ate his muffins with a professor who talked the new mathematics and he came home a little late for dinner, dreamily placid.

The parlormaid met him in the hall. There was a lady waiting for him: Lady Dolly Pendeen.

A pair of slim legs were displayed before the fire in the morning room, crossing and uncrossing. That was all he could see of her at first, her small person was sunk in a big chair, but she started up as he came in. "Now what in the world is the matter with you?" said Reggie.

Her little shoulders moved. Her face was red. "Oh, Mr. Fortune, you don't mind my coming, do you?" She took his hand and held on to it. "You've always been such a lamb, I felt sure you'd help me."

Reggie recovered his hand. "Haven't you got a nice doctor of your own?"

"An ordinary doctor wouldn't do."

"And what is it that an ordinary doctor won't do?"

"Well, he wouldn't know. About this Zodiacs case."

"I don't know anything about Zodiacs."

"Oh, I don't mean the silly shares. I mean this man who was found dead. You know all about that, I'm sure."

"I know all that's in the papers."

"Oh, but that isn't anything, not really, is it? You see, I'm awfully interested, Mr. Fortune. It means a frightful lot to me."

"I'm sorry."

"But you will help me! I want to know what you really think about it. You see, there's only you."

"Oh, no. Lots of people."

"But it will come to you, you know it will. Are they going to make out Franklin Lee did it?"

"I'm sorry," Mr. Fortune stood up. "This isn't doing anybody any good."

"You won't help me?"

"You oughtn't to be here. Good night."

Lady Dolly stared at him a moment and ran out of the house.

Mr. Fortune's comfortable face was troubled. "Not one of our nicer young persons," he said sadly. "Did Lee send her? The blighter. Yes, Lomas, a mucky case."

He has always been ready to admit that he never saw his way through it, but considers this no disgrace. The argument is that the obscurities were not within his functions as a man of science. In fact, he classes the case among his best, remarking that he touched the spot from the first: when Miss Fison shuddered and said, "He was all wet."

The morning papers said there was sensational evidence at the Bure inquest: doctors find death by violence; Franklin Lee's story; the missing stick. It was obvious what reporters and editors were getting ready for. And Zodiacs bore up firmly. But some of the papers mentioned that the mining market was uneasy.

At the mortuary Mr. Fortune found the two doctors waiting for him with a hostile manner. He said that it was very good of them. The divisional surgeon snorted and understood Mr. Fortune was not satisfied with his evidence. Mr. Fortune wouldn't say that: the department wanted another opinion. Dr. Smith must own that he was surprised: he had found himself in complete agreement with the divisional surgeon. It appeared to him there was no possibility of doubt: he would be glad to know what point in their evidence suggested it to Mr. Fortune.

"My dear Doctor, I don't doubt you found everything you said you found."

"I am obliged to you," Dr. Smith was more haughty than ever. "Am I to infer that you expect to find something else?"

"It's a mistake to rely on expectations, you know," said Reggie slowly.

"I am glad to hear you say so," Dr. Smith condescended. "I came to this sad case with a perfectly open mind, Mr. Fortune. I may say, a blank mind. I was forced to the one conclusion. Please understand that I shall be happy to assist you in your examination."

"Ay, we'll be present," the divisional surgeon growled.

Mr. Fortune said that they were very good. But when they were shut in with the dead body he had to be curt with Dr. Smith. Dr. Smith wanted to demonstrate. The amiability of Mr. Fortune does not extend

to those who would teach him his job. Dr. Smith, swelling and purple, retreated upon the divisional surgeon and they murmured together.

Medical students have been heard to say that Fortune is slow. He was very slow with the body of Mr. Bure. The murmuring of the two doctors rose loud before he was done with the damaged head. But that was not the end. The body also occupied him a long time. . . .

When at last he turned away, his face was still set in thought.

"Well, sir," Dr. Smith cried, "do you still dispute our conclusion?"

"You'll not deny he was killed by that injury to the head?" said the divisional surgeon.

Reggie pointed to red lines running down the dead man's chest. "What did you make of this? You didn't mention it."

The divisional surgeon smiled. "I did not. He wouldn't be dying of shingles."

"Look again," said Reggie, and went to wash his hands.

"I'll grant you, it looks queer." The divisional surgeon's voice changed as he pored over the body. "But what would it be but shingles?"

"Undoubtedly shingles," Dr. Smith boomed. "I see nothing abnormal, Keir."

"Ay, ay." The divisional surgeon looked at Reggie. "What are you putting to us, Mr. Fortune?"

"Well, what about his hat?" said Reggie.

"Lord, man, I've never seen his

hat," the divisional surgeon cried. "I didn't get to the body on the ground. I only saw him laid out here. What about his hat, Smith?"

"I know nothing of his hat," said Dr. Smith. "He had none on when I reached him. Really, Mr. Fortune, I must say I don't follow your methods."

"I daresay the policeman picked it up," Reggie murmured. "They're very careful, the police." He went out and called the mortuary keeper. He wanted Mr. Bure's hat and all Mr. Bure's clothes.

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir. They were sopping wet. Wet to the skin, he was. And I didn't like to dry 'em."

"Quite right," Reggie nodded. And the hat and the clothes were brought. He picked up the hat. It was a bowler. It was perfectly in shape. He looked at the two doctors. "Not a sign of a blow," he said softly.

Dr. Smith took it from him. "I presume his hat fell off in the struggle," he cried, fingering it. . . . "Why, it's torn."

"Yes, that's very interesting. A tear on the left side. But not crushed at all. How was it torn, Doctor? Not by a blow." He took up the clothes and examined them carefully with nose as well as eye.

"Good Lord, man, I get you now," the divisional surgeon cried, and himself began to search them. "But there's naught to show."

"No. He was all wet," Mr. Fortune murmured. "What was in his pockets?" A wallet, a gold cigarette case,

and some silver had been brought, with a penknife and a wooden match-box. He opened the match-box. The match heads were still sodden. He took up the penknife and opened it, produced his own and laid blade upon blade. He wandered round the room, found a pen, pulled out the nib, and laid it on the table. Mr. Bure's penknife picked it up.

"Magnetized!" the divisional surgeon cried. "Look you now, Smith, it's magnetized! Not a singe on his hair or his clothes, but his knife's magnetized."

"He was all wet, you see," Mr. Fortune said mildly.

"Man, is that what gave you the hint? You're extraordinarily acute, Mr. Fortune."

"I do not follow," Dr. Smith announced.

"The poor fellow was struck by lightning in those thunder showers we had and we would have been putting it on the man Lee! It's a very remarkable case. Ay, ay, but we'll be none too proud of it, eh, Smith? Mr. Fortune, I hope you'll let us down as light as you can."

"Yes. Unusual case. Don't get 'em in practice, of course."

"It is an amazing theory," said Dr. Smith, pale and shrunken. "I—I really, I must not be understood as accepting it. Dear me, it's very late. I have a number of calls—I must leave you." He hurried away.

The divisional surgeon grinned. "That's how you make us feel, Mr. Fortune. Be gentle with us, won't

you? Thank the Lord, we've done no harm."

A little later Reggie talked to Lomas over the telephone. "Peace be with you. Come and dine with me tonight. Why? Oh, just to show there's no ill-feeling. What? Am I satisfied now? Yes, thank you. They were all wrong. Very grateful and comforting. One of my best cases. Nobody for you to hang. I don't say nobody ought to be hanged. There's a lot of dirty work about. But Bure wasn't murdered. He was killed by lightning. Yes, I said lightning."

"Good Gad," the telephone answered. "So that's what you were after!"

Lomas came to dine before the usual time. He found Mr. Fortune dressed and dozing in front of a bright wood-fire. "Is that you?" the pink face said without opening its eyes. "Don't have a cocktail, will you? I'm going to give you some Richebourg in its bloom and one of Elise's own filets. She said something about crêpes."

"This is killing the fatted calf. I appreciate it. Thank you, I won't have a cocktail. But I should like a little information."

"I was afraid so," Mr. Fortune sighed. He rolled out of his chair. "Exhibit A: Note of telephone message from the Air Ministry. A heavy thunder shower passed over the high ground of Barton Heath between 1 and 2 p.m. on May 1. Exhibit B: A penknife found in the right-hand trousers pocket of the late Arthur

Bure, which is sufficiently magnetized to pick up a nib: thus."

"But is that all your evidence?"

"Oh; no, no. Bure wore a bowler hat. It had received no blow, but on the left side it was torn. The injury to the head and the bruise on the neck show no marks of any weapon. Bure's chest bears red streaks such as are only produced by shock from electricity — or heat. Other points, too."

"But I thought if a man was struck by lightning he was always burnt or singed somewhere."

"Quite often. But Bure was all wet. He wouldn't burn. There have been cases like it. It's quite clear. Lee left him and went on to the station. Bure was up on the heath when the storm came down with no shelter. He'd be drenched in a few minutes. Then the lightning struck him."

"You've no sort of doubt?"

"You'll hear me swear. Same like Dr. Smith." Reggie smiled.

"Does he take it back?"

"Not to notice. Not nicely. Your divisional surgeon does, though. He's not in it."

"Oh, Lord." Lomas let his eyeglass fall. "What's this? Not in it?"

"Hush. Put off the world. Here's dinner."

They went in. They ate Elise's mousseline of sole and her filet and her pancakes, and drank Richebourg of 1906, and talked of these things and others not wholly unworthy of them. Not till they had come to coffee and smoke did the Bure case intrude. "I suppose you see your way

through this Zodiacs business, Reginald," said Lomas.

"Oh, no, no. Speakin' strictly, we don't get anywhere, do we?"

"My dear fellow, you mustn't say that. You've kept us out of a very nasty mess. All my acknowledgments. And you've saved Mr. Franklin Lee's life for him."

"Yes, I think so. Yet I cannot love him."

"Not a winning personality, no," Lomas agreed. "But he has a right to live."

"Well, the other fellows have no right to do him in."

"You suggest bad faith?"

"Look at it. Our Dr. Smith, Bure's medical man, as soon as Bure's dead, goes bald-headed to get Lee hanged for it; nobbles the other doctor; and, confound him, he cheeks me."

"Professional vanity, my dear fellow."

"Yes. That's all right. But I don't care for the professional vanity that swears blind to hang a man for the Stock Exchange."

"Oh, you go as far as that?"

"Look at it. When it got about that Lee was to be brought in as Bure's murderer, up went Zodiacs. Neat way of getting rid of Lee."

"It is a filthy case," Lomas nodded.

"I suppose Lee has got hold of something that dishes Zodiacs?"

"I daresay. Lots of strings being pulled on all sides. Lee tried to work me."

"What again?" Lomas stared.

The parlormaid came in. Sir Mar-

maddock Jones would like a word with Mr. Fortune.

"Oh, my aunt!" Reggie murmured. "What are we coming to? Pardon me." He went into his consulting room.

Sir Marmaduke Jones was not in evening dress, a deficiency which in him at that hour was previously unknown. He explained that he was sure Fortune would forgive him: been terribly driven; did hope he wasn't troublesome; just wanted a few words; his old friend Smith . . .

Mr. Fortune waited for him to take breath. He seemed to want it. "Smith?" said Mr. Fortune.

Sir Marmaduke meant Dr. John Smith of Barton Heath. A very sound man, most reliable opinion. Smith had been consulting him, and really he thought it was only right to come and put Smith's view of the matter.

"He's done that himself," said Mr. Fortune.

But really, Fortune, it couldn't be dismissed so curtly. Smith's opinion was formed after the most careful examination, a well-grounded, reasoned opinion and (Sir Marmaduke must say) it commanded confidence. The theory which Fortune had put forward was surely a little fantastic: it depended on very slight indications and imaginative inferences. Surely Fortune must realize that to throw over Dr. Smith's conclusions for such a startling hypothesis must have a very odd look.

"Don't mind me. The jury will

choose whether they believe Smith's evidence or mine."

Sir Marmaduke must ask his dear Fortune not to take the case so lightly. After all, there were very grave matters involved: very large interests. He did not hesitate to say that no case in his time had been of such importance to the public. Was it fair, was it right that Fortune should traverse the medical evidence already sworn on such small grounds? A very, very dangerous course. As an old friend — long experience — a man of the world — Fortune might trust him — no rash action — Fortune would never regret it.

"In a simpler world I should knock you down," said Mr. Fortune.

"My dear Fortune, you mistake me. I —"

"Oh, no. No mistake. It was either a bribe or a threat. I have the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department here. He'll be very pleased to see you. You're what we were waiting for."

"I am? I?"

"Yes. Don't go."

Mr. Fortune went out, and gave Lomas a summary of Sir Marmaduke Jones. "Good Gad! The scoundrel! Who sent him?"

"That's your show. Come on." They came downstairs and heard the voice of Sir Marmaduke uplifted.

"The beggar's on the telephone," Lomas muttered. "Wait!"

Sir Marmaduke's voice went higher. "What? What? I can't hear you. I can't hear. Oh, my Lord!" There was

silence. They went into the room to see Sir Marmaduke with the telephone hanging from his hands; he dropped it, he staggered, he fell. Reggie went to him. Lomas went to the telephone. "Hallo, hallo. Who is that, please?" This familiar tune filled the room while Reggie worked on the fallen man. "I can't get an answer. What's the matter with him?"

"Fainting. Shock." Reggie rang the bell and servants came, and while Sir Marmaduke was taken to a bedroom Lomas sat down again to the telephone. . . .

When Reggie came back he was still at it, but in a brisk conversation with Scotland Yard. "Right. Get on to it. I'll be there myself in ten minutes." He rang off and turned to Reggie. "Well, how is the patient?"

"In his little bed, confound him. He had the impertinence to squeeze my hand."

"All my sympathy. A worm, quite a worm. It was Lord Blancapel he rang up. I suppose he had to tell his employer he'd failed with you. Blancapel has just shot himself. The butler was scared by a row, went into the study, found him dead with the pistol in his hand. Telephone receiver lying on the table. Marmaduke Jones must have heard the shot and crashed."

"Yes. Yes. Very convenient all round, wasn't it?"

"Oh, quite! Thank you for a very pleasant evening, Reginald."

It was late in the afternoon of the next day but one that Lomas came

back. He found Mr. Fortune in the drawing room arranging a bowl of iris with tender care.

"My dear Reginald, I thought we should have seen you before," he said brightly. Mr. Fortune stared melancholy curiosity and asked why. "Well, I think we have worked it all out." Mr. Fortune sighed and asked what. "There's the devil to pay on the Stock Exchange. All Blancapel's things are down and out. He seems to have been in a bad way when he started Zodiacs. That was a double-or-quits gamble. Then Lee turned up with a rival concession on the best of the Zodiac ground. Bure was put on to buy him out. They did bid high but they couldn't find Lee's price. There are some desperate letters in Blancapel's papers. When Bure was killed, Blancapel snatched at the chance to get rid of Lee. He's been in touch with Smith and then this worm Marmaduke Jones. That was the last chance. When Jones telephoned there was nothing doing, that broke him. He dropped the telephone and took his pistol. You see, we've got it all fitting now. He put it that Lee murdered Bure, and that sent Zodiacs up again. While he could keep the case strong against Lee, they'd go up and up. But with Lee cleared he was beat." Lomas rubbed his hands. "We've made a pretty neat case of it, haven't we?"

Mr. Fortune gazed at him with round, admiring eyes.

"How do you do these things, Lomas?" he murmured.

The critics always had a phrase for Rafael Sabatini's work. His stories, they said, were "rich in action" — "the epitome of chivalry" — "blood-tingling romance spiced with personal peril." And with these qualities the late Mr. Sabatini strove "to please, to dazzle, and to entertain" . . .

THE SCAPULARY

by RAFAEL SABATINI

THE UNEASINESS THAT HAD BEEN disturbing Gaspard de Putanges ever since the King had visited the wounded Admiral de Coligny reached a climax that night when he found his way barred by armed men at the Porte St. Denis, and a password was demanded of him.

"Password!" cried that Huguenot gentleman in amazement. "Is a password necessary before a man can leave Paris? And why, if you please? Are we suddenly at war?"

"Those are the orders," the officer stiffly answered.

"Whose orders?" M. de Putanges was impatient.

"I owe you no account, sir. You will give me the word of the night, or you may return home and wait until morning."

Perforce he must turn his horse about, and, with his groom at his heels, ride back by the way that he had come. The vexation which at any time he must have felt at this unwarranted interference with his movements was now swollen by misgivings.

He was one of the host of Huguenot gentlemen brought to Paris for the nuptials of the King of Navarre with

the sister of the King of France, a marriage which the pacifists of both parties had hoped would heal the feud between the Catholic and Protestant factions. But the Guisard attempt upon the life of Coligny, the great Huguenot leader, had now rudely dashed this hope. M. de Putanges had been one of that flock of Huguenot gentlemen who that day had thronged the wounded Admiral's antechamber, when the epileptic king and the sleepy-eyed Queen Mother came to pay their visit of sympathy. He had listened with misgivings to the braggart threats of his coreligionists; with increased misgivings he had observed the open hostility of their bearing towards Catherine de' Medici what time she stood amongst them with Anjou, whilst the King her son was closeted with his dear gossip, M. de Coligny. These hot-headed fools, he felt, were fanning a fire that might presently blaze out to consume them all. Already the Hotel de Guise was in a state of fortification, filled with armed men ripe for any mischief, whilst others of the Guisard faction were abroad exciting public feeling with fantastic stories of the Huguenot

peril, stories which gathered colour from the turbulent, thrasonical bearing of these Huguenots, enraged by the attempt upon their leader's life.

And now, finding the gates of Paris barred for no apparent reason, it seemed to M. de Putanges that the danger he had been apprehending was close upon them, though in what form he could not yet discern.

It was therefore as well that he should be forced to postpone his journey into the country, however necessary, and that he should remain to watch over his wife.

Now this was a consideration in which M. de Putanges discovered a certain humour. He was a thoughtful gentleman with a lively sense of irony, and it amused him after a certain bitter fashion to observe his own mechanical obedience to his sense of duty towards the cold, arrogant, discontented lady who bore his name. You know, of course, of the beautiful Madame de Putanges and of the profound impression which her beauty and wit had made upon the Court of France upon this her first appearance there. It is even rumoured — and not at all difficult to believe — that amongst those who prostrated themselves in worship before her was the very bridegroom Henri of Navarre himself. But at least the lady was virtuous — her one saving grace in her husband's eyes — and of a mind that was not to be discomposed by the flattery of even a royal wooing. It is not without humour that the only quality M. de Putanges could

find to commend in her was that same cold aloofness which so embittered him. It was a paradox upon which he had found occasion to comment to his friend and cousin Stanislas de la Vauvraye.

"The gods who cast her in a mould so fair have given her for heart a stone."

That was the formula in which habitually he expressed it to Stanislas, conscious that it sounded like a line from a play.

"I curse her for the very quality that makes my honour safe; because this quality, that in another woman would be a virtue, is almost a vice in her."

And Stanislas, the gay trifler who turned all things to cynical jest, had merely laughed. "Be content, Gaspard, with a blessing denied most husbands."

Yet however little M. de Putanges might count himself blessed as a husband, he was fully conscious of a husband's duty, and his first thought now that he suspected trouble was for his wife.

He made his way to the *Veau qui Tête*, where his horses were stabled and his grooms were housed, and, having dismounted there, set out for the small house he temporarily occupied close by, in the Rue Bellerose. The summer night had closed down by then, but there was a fair moon that rendered the use of flambeaux unnecessary. As he stepped out into the street he came upon a man bent double under a load of pikes. It was

an odd sight and M. de Putanges stood arrested by it, watching the fellow as he staggered down the narrow street until he was absorbed by the shadows of the night. Yet even as he vanished a second man similarly laden came stumbling past. M. de Putanges fell into step beside the fellow.

"Whither are you carrying that arsenal?" he demanded.

The perspiring hind looked up from under his sinister load.

"It is for the entertainment at the Louvre, Monsieur."

As a gentleman in the train of the King of Navarre, M. de Putanges was bidden to all court functions. Yet here was one of which he had not so much as heard, and well might he ask himself what entertainment was this that was being kept so secret and in which pikes were to be employed. It was difficult to suppose that their purpose could be festive.

With ever-mounting uneasiness M. de Putanges lengthened his stride for home. But at the corner, where the Rue Bellerose cuts across the more important Rue St. Antoine, he ran into a group of men on the threshold of an imposing house that was all in darkness. At a glance he perceived that all were armed beyond the habit of peaceful citizens. Headpiece and corselet glinted lividly in the moonlight, and as he approached he caught from one on a note of sinister laughter the word "*Parpaillots*" — the nickname bestowed on members of the Huguenot party.

That was enough for M. de Putanges. Boldly — he was a man who never lacked for boldness — he mingled with the little throng. Others were joining it at every moment and already some were passing into the house, so that his coming was hardly observed; it would be assumed that he was one of themselves, bidden like them to this assembly. Perceiving this, and overhearing from one of those beside him the boast that by morning there would not be a whole heretic skin in Paris, M. de Putanges determined to push on and obtain more complete knowledge of what might be preparing. Heedless, then, of risks, he thrust forward to the threshold and attaching himself to a little knot of gentlemen in the act of entering, he went in with them, and up a broad, scantily-lighted staircase. At the stair-head the foremost of the company knocked upon a double door. One of its leaves was half opened and there ensued between someone within and each of those who sought admittance a preliminary exchange of confused murmurs. M. de Putanges pushed nearer, straining his ears; and at last from one whose mutter was louder than the others he caught the words: "France and the Faith." A moment later he was giving the same countersign.

He won through into a spacious gallery that was tolerably lighted by four great girandoles, and already thronged by men from every walk of life. All were armed and all were excited. From what he observed,

from what was said to him even — for there was none here to recognize this gentleman of Béarn, or to suppose him other than one of themselves — he quickly came to understand that the thing preparing was no less than a massacre of the Huguenots in Paris.

Anon, when the room was filled almost to the extent of its capacity and the doors were closed, a lean, fiery-eyed preaching friar, in the black and white habit of St. Dominic, mounted a table and delivered thence at length what might be called a "sermon of the faith", a fierce denunciation of heresy.

"Hack it down, branch by branch, tear it up by the roots; extirpate from the land this pestilential growth, this upas tree that poisons the very air we breathe. About it, my children! Be stern and diligent and unsparing in this holy work!"

Those terrible final words of incitement were ringing in his ears when M. de Putanges quitted at last that chamber, with its physically and morally mephitic atmosphere, and was borne out upon a brawling, seething human torrent, into the clean air of early dawn. The human mass broke into packs which turned away in one direction and another to the cry — fierce and menacing as the baying of hounds upon a scent — of "Parpailots! Parpailots! Kill! Kill!"

He won free of them at length, forearmed at least by knowledge of what to expect — by knowledge and something more. In that chamber,

whilst the sermon had been preaching, someone had tied a strip of white calico to his left arm and set in his hat a cross made of two short pieces of white ribbon. These were the insignia of the slayers and in themselves would have afforded him immunity in the open streets, but that upon an impulse of unreasoning disgust he tore one and the other from him and flung them in the kennel. This as he plunged at last down the Rue Belle-rose towards home.

In a measure, as the sounds of his late companions receded from him, ahead of him grew an ominous rumble, coming from the quays and the neighbourhood of the river; and then, a crackling volley of musketry rang out abruptly from the direction of the Louvre.

M. de Putanges stood still and wondered a moment whether the faint flush in the sky was a herald of the early summer dawn or the reflection of fire. He became suddenly aware that the Rue Bellerose was astir with flitting shadows. He came upon a man setting a mark in chalk upon a door, and, peering, beheld another similarly engaged on the opposite side of the street. He understood the meaning of it, and doubting if he would be alive by morning, he considered almost dispassionately — for he was a dispassionate man despite his southern blood — that it but remained him to seek his wife and await his fate beside her. If they had never known how to conduct their joint life becomingly, at least he hoped

they would know how to die becomingly together.

In this frame of mind he reached his own threshold to find one of the doorposts bearing the chalk sign that marked the inmates down for slaughter. How well informed were these cursed *papegots*, he thought; how well considered and well organized was their bloody work! With his sleeve he rubbed out the sign of doom. So much, at least, he could do in self-defence. And then he stood arrested, with pulses faintly quickening. Within the shadows of the deep porch something stirred, and at the same moment upon the deep-set inner door fell a triple knock three times repeated.

M. de Putanges stepped forward. Instantly the thing within the porch swung about and sprang to meet him, taking definite shape. It was a tall cowed figure in the white habit and black scapulary of a brother of St. Dominic. M. de Putanges realized that he came no more than in time, if, indeed, he did not already come too late. He felt his heart tightening at the thought, tightening with icy dread for the cold termagant he loved. And then, to increase his fears, the friar pronounced his name and so proclaimed that he was not there by chance nor attracted by the mark of doom upon the doorpost, but with sure knowledge of the house's inmates.

"Monsieur de Putanges . . ." the man exclaimed, and got no further, for utterance and breath were abruptly choked by the iron fingers that locked themselves about his throat.

The fellow writhed and struggled, thrusting out a leg to trip his aggressor, clawing fiercely at the hands that were crushing out his life, and tearing them with his nails. But tear as he might, those hands would not relax their deadly grip. Soon his struggles weakened; soon they became mere twitchings. His body sagged together like an empty sack. He went down in a heap, dragging his assailant with him, and lay still at last.

M. de Putanges stood over the fallen friar, breathing hard; the beads of sweat upon his brow resulted partly from the exertion, partly from horror of a thing done in such a cold, relentless fashion. Mastering himself at last, he went forward towards the door. To his surprise he found it open, and remembered then that the friar had knocked upon it a moment ago. The latch was worked by a cord from the floor above and must have been so worked in answer to that knock.

M. de Putanges paused in the act of entering. It was not well — particularly considering that his house had been marked — to leave that thing in the porch where it might be discovered. He went back and, taking the limp body by the arms, he dragged it across the threshold into the hall. And then the instinct of self-preservation that had guided him so far urged yet another step. In that *papegot* livery it was possible that he might find safety for himself and his wife from the perils that were so obviously closing round them. The faintly re-

flected radiance of the moon afforded sufficient light for the simple task. In a moment he had unknotted the man's girdle and relieved him of habit and scapulary. Over his own clothes he donned the Dominican's loose white habit, and drew the cowl over his head. Then he closed the door, and set foot upon the narrow stairs, even as from the street outside a sudden shrieking of women was silenced by a fusillade. The massacre, he perceived, was in full swing already.

Overhead a light gleamed faintly; looking up from the darkness that encompassed him, he beheld in the feeble aureole of a candle, which she was holding, the face of Madame de Putanges. She was peering down, seeking with her glance to pierce the darkness of the staircase. He must speak at once, lest the sight of his monkish figure should alarm her. But even as he conceived the thought her silvery voice, strained now on an anxious note, forestalled him.

"How late you are, Stanislas!" she said.

In the gloom of the staircase, Gaspard de Putanges stood petrified, whilst through his mind that welcome meant for another echoed and re-echoed:

"How late you are, *Stanislas!*"

After a moment our gentleman's wits resumed their wonted function, sharpened now perhaps beyond their usual keenness. He scarcely needed to ask himself who could be this Stanislas for whom she mistook him. It could be none other than his dear friend

and cousin, that gay trifler and libertine Stanislas de la Vauvraye. And she was expecting him at a time when she must suppose M. de Putanges already far from Paris. Was it possible, he asked himself, that he had thus by chance stumbled upon the explanation of her cold aloofness towards himself? Was Stanislas the Judas who simulated friendship in order that he might the more conveniently betray? In a flash a score of trifling incidents were suddenly remembered and connected to flood the mind of M. de Putanges with the light of revelation.

"Stanislas! Why don't you answer?" rang the impatient voice he knew so well.

Whence this absolute assurance of hers that he was the man she expected? He bethought him of that curious triple knock thrice repeated with which the friar had sought admittance, and in response to which the door-latch had been so promptly lifted from above. It was a signal, of course. But, then, the friar . . .

On a sudden suspicion amounting almost to certainty, M. de Putanges stepped back.

"Stanislas!" came again Madame de Putanges' call.

"A moment," he answered to quiet her. "I am coming."

He ran his fingers swiftly over the face and head of the man he had choked. Here was no tonsure; no shaven cheeks. The hair of the head was full and crisp; moustachios bristled on the lip, and a little peaked beard sprouted from the chin: there was a

jewel in the left ear which, like the rest, was as it should be with Stanislas de la Vauvraye. The garments were soft and silken—a slashed doublet and the rest. No doubt remained. All that remained was the mystery of how Stanislas should have come to be muffled in that monkish robe. That, however, could wait. It mattered little in comparison with all the rest. In his cursory examination of the body, M. de Putanges had ascertained that the man still breathed. He had not quite choked out his life.

He locked the street-door and pocketed the key; then he went up the stairs with a step that was as firm and steady as his purpose.

When at last his cowed monkish figure came within the circle of light of the waiting woman's candle, she started back.

"Why, what is this? Who are you, sir?" Then remembering the covenanted knock to which she had opened, she partly explained the monkish travesty. "Why do you come thus, Stanislas?"

"That," was the quiet answer, "we may ask presently of Stanislas himself."

She staggered at the sound of her husband's voice, and a deathly pallor overspread her face. Her dark eyes opened wide in terror: her lips parted, but instead of speech they uttered a mere inarticulate sound of fear and horror, almost piteous to hear. Then she recovered, as he flung back his cowl and smiled upon her, grim, and white-faced as herself.

"You!" she gasped.

He observed that she was dressed for travelling, cloaked and hatted, and that a valise stood beside her at the stair-head.

"I thought you were gone to Pol-darnes," she said stupidly, a mere uncontrolled utterance of her mind.

"I am sorry, madame, to discompose you by so inopportune a return. Circumstances compelled it, as I will presently explain."

Then at last the termagant in her recovered the sway momentarily extinguished by surprise.

"It needs no explanation, sir," she answered with angry scorn, and angry unreason. "You returned to spy upon me."

"Ô fie, madame! To accuse me of that! But how unjust, how foolishly unjust! Had you but honoured me with your confidence, had you but informed me of your intent to elope with my dear friend and kinsman, I should have left you a clear field. I am too fond of you both to attempt against you so cruel a frustration of your designs."

"You mean that you would have been glad to be rid of me!" was her fierce reproach.

M. de Putanges laughed his bitter amusement that even in such a situation she must make her own the grievance.

"Not glad, perhaps: but fortunate, madame," said he. "Once the hurt and humiliation of it were overcome, I might have seen in my dear kinsman Stanislas my best of friends."

She fastened swiftly upon this admission. "That is why I am leaving you."

"But, of course. Do I not perceive it? I have, madame, a more sympathetic understanding than you have ever done me the justice to suppose."

She answered by no more than an inarticulate expression of contempt.

"I shall hope to prove it to you to-night, madame," he insisted. "You may come to account it as fortunate for yourself as it is unfortunate for me that I returned. If you will be so good as to step into the salon, I will fetch my dear cousin Stanislas."

This was to arouse her alarms afresh. "You will fetch him!" she gasped. "Where . . . where is he?"

"He is below."

She was suddenly suspicious, glaring, fierce as a tigress. "What have you done to him?"

"Oh, be reassured! — no permanent injury. He is a little . . . out of breath, shall we say? But that will pass."

"Let me go to him."

He barred her way. "It is not necessary. He shall come to you. In no case can you depart just now. The streets are not safe. Listen!" Vague, hideous sounds of the foul business that was afoot penetrated the silence in which they stood, and filled her with wonder and some dread. He enlightened her. "They are murdering the Huguenots in Paris to-night. That is what brought me back, supposing you would need protection, never dreaming that you would have

the dear, brave Stanislas so near at hand."

He took advantage of her amazement to add: "If you will forgive the impertinence of the question, how long has M. de la Vauvraye been your lover, madame?"

She flushed to her eyes. "Why must you insult me?"

"You are susceptible then to insult?"

Her anger, goaded by his cold mockery, raced on. "Should I have stayed a single moment under your roof after taking a lover?" she demanded passionately. "Do you think me capable of that?"

"I see," said M. de Putanges, and sighed. "You possess a casuist's mind, madame. You swallow camels yet strain at gnats."

"Maybe. But I am honest, monsieur."

"After your own fashion, madame; strictly after your own fashion."

"After my own fashion, if you will. You have a great gift for mockery, monsieur."

"Be thankful, madame. The man who does not know how and when to laugh sometimes does very foolish and very painful things. And so, you were saying that you are honest . . ."

"I think I prove it. Having taken my resolve, I am leaving your house to-night. I am going away with M. de la Vauvraye."

She was defiant. He bowed to her will.

"Why, so you shall, for me. It remains to take measures for your

safety, considering what is happening in the street. Be so good as to wait in the salon, whilst I fetch this dear Stanislas."

He took the candle from her limp hand and went down the stairs again. He found his kinsman sitting up, in bewilderment — a bewilderment which the sight of M. de Putanges transmuted into stark fear.

But M. de Putanges was of a reassuring urbanity. "Be good enough to step up to the salon with me, my dear cousin. Henriette desires a word with you, whereafter you may carry out or not your fond intentions. That will depend. Meanwhile, be thankful that I have returned in time, as I gather from what madame tells me. If the harm were already beyond repair I should for my honour's sake be compelled to renew, and this time to complete, the strangling of you. That would be a painful matter for us both, for I have a horror of violence, as you know, my dear Stanislas. Fortunately the affair may still be amicably decided. The circumstances of the night are particularly propitious. Be so good, then, as to come up with me."

M. de la Vauvraye, his mind benumbed by this extraordinary turn of what should have been so simple and delightful an adventure, followed his kinsman up the stairs with an obedience of such utter helplessness as to be almost entirely mechanical.

In the salon they found Madame awaiting them. She stood by the heavy, carved table of dark oak well

in the light of the dozen tapers that burned in a gilded candlebranch. Her beautiful face was pale and haggard, yet neither so pale nor so haggard as that of the lover she now confronted in circumstances so vastly different from all that she had expected of this night.

She had declared to him but yesterday that it was to be the most fateful night of her life, and in that, indeed, she appeared to have been a true prophetess.

Of the three, the only one at ease — outwardly at least — was M. de Putanges. Tall, erect, virilely handsome, a man in the very flower of his age, bronzed, intrepid and aquiline of countenance, he made the golden-headed trifler la Vauvraye seem so sickly and effeminate by contrast that it was difficult to discern how any woman could have come to prefer him.

"Be seated, pray." Suavity itself, M. de Putanges waved each in turn to a chair. "I shall not keep you long."

La Vauvraye, under the woman's eyes, realizing that he was in danger of cutting a poor, unheroic figure, summoned impudence to his aid. "You relieve my fears, monsieur." With a shrug and a half-laugh he sank to an arm-chair. He was not as successful as he thought, for his crumpled ruff and dishevelled hair lent him an appearance which dignity but made the more ridiculous.

"Your fears?" quoth M. de Putanges.

"Of being wearied by futile recrim-

inations. Weariness is the thing in life that I most dread."

"Reassure yourself. You are in no danger of it. Indeed, the night should bring a surfeit of excitement even to such a glutton for high adventure."

La Vauvraye stifled a yawn. "If you will but explain," he begged on a half plaintive note.

"Of course. But first a question: How came you by this Dominican frock in which I found you?"

"Oh, that!" M. de la Vauvraye was casual. "You will know by now what is afoot to-night. I, too, discovered it as I was coming here. At the end of the Rue Bellerose I came upon a shaveling I had met once or twice at Court. Unfortunately for him, he knew me too, and calling me by name threatened me with a heretic's doom. It was rash. I had a dagger . . . I silenced that too garrulous friar, and left him in a doorway."

"Possessing yourself of his habit?"

"Why, yes. I realized that on such a night his scapulary would possess the virtues that are claimed for scapularies, would be a panoply against all perils. You would seem to have been of the same mind yourself when, taking me unawares, you became possessed of it and donned it in your turn."

"And then, dear cousin? Continue."

"What more is there to tell?"

"Why, that you counted upon the frock to shield not only yourself but this Huguenot lady with whom you had planned an elopement for to-night."

"Oh, that, of course." The nonchalance was almost overdone.

"It was my notion, too. Since we are both agreed as to its excellence, there is no reason not to act upon it."

The affected languor passed from M. de la Vauvraye's eyes. They became alert and keen to the point almost of anxiety. M. de Putanges proceeded to explain himself.

"Madame de Putanges must be saved," he said quietly. "That, you will realize, is the paramount consideration. She must be carried out of reach of this bloodshed before it is too late. Escorted by a brother of St. Dominic the thing is easy. We have but to determine which of us shall assume the frock and take her hence, which shall remain behind to die nobly for her sake. Since we both love her, the decision should be easy, for neither of us should hesitate to remain. Rather do I fear a generous emulation as to which shall go." He dealt so delicately in irony that neither of his listeners could be certain that he was ironical.

With blanched cheeks and bulging eyes, M. de la Vauvraye stared at his cousin, waiting. The handsome woman seated in the high-backed chair looked on with parted lips, her breathing quickened, and waited, too.

M. de Putanges resumed: "But for what is taking place in Paris tonight, my dear cousin, it might be necessary to choose some other way of resolving this painful situation. As it is, our common concern for Madame de

Putanges points the way clearly. One of us goes. The other stays behind to die. Ideal and complete solution. It but remains to determine our respective parts." He paused and the silence within that room was tense and heavy. Outside was uproar — the baying of the fanatical mob, the crash of shivered timbers and the screams of luckless victims.

M. de la Vauvraye moistened his parched lips with his tongue.

"And how . . . how is that to be determined?" he asked in a quavering, high-pitched voice that cracked on the last word.

"What way but one could galantly conceive? It is for Madame de Putanges to choose." He bowed deferentially, as he consigned into her hands that monstrous decision.

M. de la Vauvraye expressed in a gasp his immense relief, never doubting Madame's choice, never observing the stark horror that distorted her lovely face, nor how that horror deepened at the sound he made.

But M. de Putanges had something yet to add. He was being extremely subtle, where neither of his listeners suspected subtlety.

"Thus, madame, you shall have at last the choice that should have been yours at first. It is in your power to-night to repair the injustice that was done you three years ago when, unconsulted, you were driven into a wedlock of arrangement." He sighed. "Perhaps had I wooed you first and wed you afterwards all might have been well with us. I realize to-night

the profound mistake of reversing that natural course of things, and I am almost glad of the opportunity to correct it, by giving you now, late though it be, the choice that is a woman's right. So pronounce, madame. Determine of your own free will which of us shall assume the frock and bear you hence, which shall remain to die."

On that he ended, looking with solemn inscrutable glance deep into the eyes that stared at him out of his wife's white, horror-stricken face. He knew — unless he knew nothing of human nature — that the woman did not live who could take upon her conscience the responsibility of such a choice: and upon that knowledge he was boldly trading.

To help him to his deep end came the bleating voice of his foolish rival, urgent with an obvious meaning that he dared not actually express in words. "Henriette! Henriette!"

M. de Putanges observed her shrink and cringe before that appeal, as if conscious only of the meanness and cowardice that inspired it. Upon something of that kind, too, had he counted. He intended to compel her to-night to look, as she had never yet troubled to look, into his soul. And he intended no less to lay bare the little soul of the trifler for whom she would have left him. She should have the free choice he offered her; but first there should be full revelation to guide her in her choice.

"Well, madame?" He loosened the girdle of his monkish habit, as if to

stress his readiness for renunciation at her bidding. "Which of us shall wear the frock, the scapulary of salvation — more potently protecting to-night than any consecrated prophylactic?"

And again from M. de la Vauvraye — now half risen — came the appeal — "Henriette!"

Madame de Putanges looked with the glance of a hunted creature from one to the other of those men. Then a shudder ran through her; she twisted and untwisted the fingers of her interlocked hands, and faintly moaned.

"I cannot! I cannot!" she cried out at last. "No — no! I cannot have the blood of either of you on my soul."

M. de la Vauvraye flung himself back in his chair, his lip in his teeth, his hands clenched, whilst M. de Putanges smiled with wistful understanding.

"Yet consider, madame," he urged her, "that unless you choose we are likely all three of us to perish here together."

"I can't! I can't! I will not choose. It is monstrous to demand it of me," she cried.

"Demand?" echoed M. de Putanges. "Oh, madame, I do not demand; I invite. But to spare your feelings, since you prove so tender in this matter, it shall be determined otherwise; and that I must deplore, because in no other way could your future happiness be assured. Still . . ." He broke off, and flung the Dominican frock and scapulary, of which he had now divested himself, upon the

table; then he turned to a tall press that stood against the wall, and took from one of its drawers a dice-box. Rattling the cubes in their leathern container, he looked across at his kinsman.

"Come, cousin. You love a hazard. Here is one in which the stakes are something rare: love and life are here for one of us."

M. de la Vauvraye, who had risen, shrank back in fear. If he loved hazards, he loved them not quite so hazardous.

"No, no," he cried, thrusting out his hands in a violent gesture of denial. "This is a horror."

"What else remains?" asked M. de Putanges. "Come, man. I'll lead the way."

He threw recklessly as he spoke, thereby committing the other to the adventure. The three cubes scattered and rattled to a standstill on the polished oaken board. Madame's glittering eyes followed them and remained expressionless when the throw was revealed — two aces and a deuce.

M. de Putanges laughed softly, bitterly. "That is my luck," said he. "You should have known that I was not to be feared, Stanislas. You'll scarce hesitate now to throw against me."

Yet he was pleased enough in the heart of him. Fortune could not have served him better. Now that no risk remained M. de la Vauvraye would be as eager as before he had been hesitant, and so should make yet further self-revelation. And eager

he was. It was his turn to laugh as with trembling fingers he gathered up the dice; a hectic flush tinged his cheek-bones as he threw — two fives and a four.

"Mine!" he cried, and snatched up the frock in exultation.

M. de Putanges bowed with quiet dignity.

"My congratulations, cousin; and to you, madame, since surely Fortune must have determined as you wish, yet dared not pronounce out of a generous thought for me. For that thought I thank you. What now remains for me will be the easier in the knowledge that it comes not from you, but from Fortune." He became matter-of-fact and brisk. "You had best make haste away. There is danger in delaying."

"Indeed, indeed — he is right," M. de la Vauvraye now urged her, as he shook out the folds of the frock and with trembling fingers knotted the girdle about his middle.

But Madame made no answer to either of them. With eyes of wonder she looked from one to the other, contrasting the noble calm in adversity of this husband she had never known, with the meanly selfish eagerness of the shallow courtier whom she had imagined that she loved. M. de Putanges had promised himself to afford her full revelation; and he had succeeded beyond his hopes.

M. de la Vauvraye took a step towards her. "Come, Henriette," he was beginning, when suddenly she laughed so oddly that he checked.

She looked at him with shining eyes and oddly smiling lips.

"Do not wait for me, monsieur. All that it was yours to stake upon the throw was the scapulary that will shield your life. You have won that, and so you may win to safety. But I do not go with the scapulary. Good-night and good fortune to you, M. de la Vauvraye."

He stared at her, dumbfounded, stricken in his scanty wits and in his monstrous vanity.

"What?" he cried. "You will remain?"

"With my husband, if you please, monsieur."

Quiet and self-contained in the background beyond the table M. de Putanges looked on and wondered. M. de la Vauvraye rapped out an oath. Then anger bubbled to the surface of his shallow nature. His tone became vicious.

"Good-night, madame."

He turned on his heel; but as he reached the door her voice arrested him.

"M. de la Vauvraye!"

He turned again.

"A man in your place would have acted perhaps more generously. A man would have remembered all that is involved. A man would account that my final decision overrides the decision of the dice. He would have proffered the scapulary to the true winner. A man would have done that. But you, it seems, are something less. Since it has been tested, I am the more content to stay."

He looked at her from the depths of the cowl which he had already pulled over his head, so that his face was no longer visible. Without answering her he went out, closing the door with expressive violence. They heard his steps go pattering down the stairs, and then the sound of them was drowned in the uproar from without.

They looked at each other across the table. M. de Putanges sighed as he spoke.

"Did I conceive him worthy of you, madame, I should not have suffered you to have had your way. Even now I doubt ——"

"Gaspard," she interrupted him, "I am content. I have chosen, even though I have chosen too late." She held out a hand to him, and he saw that she was weeping. He took the hand and stooped to kiss it.

"My dear," he said, "it but remains for us to forgive each other."

As he spoke the air was shaken by a sudden roar, deeper, fiercer, nearer than any that had gone before. She sank against him shuddering in sudden fear. "What is that?"

"Wait." Swiftly he quenched the lights. Then in the darkness he groped to the shutters, opened them and flung the window wide. Screened by the gloom above, they looked down into the seething, furious mob revealed by torchlight and the breaking day.

In the clutches of a knot of frenzied

men, a Dominican friar was struggling wildly.

"Let us look at your face," they were howling; "Let us make sure that you are what you seem — that you are not the villain who murdered Father Gerbier and stole his frock."

The cowl was suddenly torn back, and the livid, distorted face of Stanislas de la Vauvraye was revealed.

"We have found you at last, you murdering heretic!" cried a voice and a pike was swung above the Huguenot's luckless head. A roar arose:

"Kill! Kill! Death to the Parpaillot!"

M. de Putanges pulled his wife back and closed the window, and the shutters. She clung to him in the dark.

"My God!" she moaned. "Had he been generous; had I been mad . . ." She said no more; she fell on her knees to pray.

Through the remainder of that night of St. Bartholomew they waited hand in hand for death. It was, they said thereafter, their true nuptial night. But death did not seek them. M. de Putanges, you will remember, had rubbed the sign of doom from the doorpost with his sleeve, and the house was not molested. Three days later, when the reaction had set in, they quietly slipped out of Paris unchallenged, and made their way back to Béarn, having found each other, truly man and wife now.



THE CASE OF THE LYING SPEEDOMETER

by AUSTIN RIPLEY

SOME OF YOU SENIORS WILL REMEMBER Ed Krause who graduated a couple of years ago," Professor Fordney said to his class. "Well, I met Ed last night—he's an FBI Special Agent—and he had an experience recently that I'm sure will interest you fellows.

"Krause and his colleague, George Hoffman, worked as farm hands on the farm of Otto Shendrik and Honus Wenger, both suspected of subversive activities. One day Shendrik's actions made it imperative that Ed contact Hoffman at a previously arranged rendezvous. So that evening at sunset he was stricken with a terrific toothache and asked Shendrik if he could drive his car to the general store for medication.

"The suspicious and penurious farmer agreed—if Ed paid for the gas. The general store was exactly $6\frac{1}{2}$ lonely miles due north of the farm and Shendrik said he got exactly 13 miles to the gallon of gas. Well, after Shendrik noted the mileage on the

speedometer, Krause paid him for one gallon. Shendrik warned him not to go a foot beyond the store—he wasn't a goin' to have his tires worn out traipsin' about!

"What a dilemma for Ed! He had to show up at the store—Shendrik might check—but his meeting place was two miles east on a road one mile south of the store. And he didn't know how to disconnect or alter the speedometer. If it showed over 13 miles of travel he would be dismissed. Yet he had to contact Hoffman!

"Ed's smart," concluded the Professor, "and was equal to the occasion. He drove to the store, then to his rendezvous with Hoffman, and then back to the farm. He didn't touch the speedometer (nor did anyone else), yet when Shendrik checked, it registered exactly 13 additional miles. How did Krause manage it?"

How did he? You will find the solution at the bottom of the page, printed upside-down.

Krause drove the distance from the main road to his meeting place and back to the main road backwards! Speedometers do not register backward mileage.

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

THE VIRGIN HUNTRESS <i>by ELISABETH SANXAY HOLDING</i> (SIMON & SCHUSTER, \$2.50)	"... supremely economical technique gives ... terrifying depth and value ..." (AB)	"... sensitive ... beautifully written ... For me this book is perfect." (FC)
CORK ON THE WATER <i>by MACDONALD HASTINGS</i> (RANDOM, \$2.50)	"... sketchy; trite ... plot ... lovely sly humor ... thrilling outdoor adventure ..." (AB)	"... disorderly and unabashed ... melodrama ... incidentally amusing ..." (JS)
HANDBOOK FOR POISONERS <i>edited by RAYMOND T. BOND</i> (RINEHART, \$2.50)	"... freshly creative collection ... fine scholarship ... in ... introduction ... Most of the stories may ... be on your shelves ..." (AB)	"... lively, long, informative preface ... tales ... almost as admirable as they are familiar." (JS)
I COULD MURDER HER <i>by E. C. R. LORAC</i> (CRIME CLUB, \$2.50)	"... formal story at very nearly its Christian best ... Detection ... and motivation have a convincing solidity ..." (AB)	"E. C. R. Lorac is ... dependable ... and a steady contentment even ... when she has more chapters than plot." (JS)
FISH LANE <i>by LOUIS CORKILL</i> (BOBBS-MERRILL, \$2.50)	"Chaotic construction and occasionally lurid overwriting ... but a peculiar individuality." (AB)	"... a kind of fiercely melodramatic flush and tumble ... style is rather conscientious than compulsive." (JS)
GOLD COAST NOCTURNE <i>by HELEN NIELSEN</i> (IVES, WASHBURN, \$2.50)	"... neat surprise twist ... warm detail on Chicago life ..." (AB)	"... rather planless activity which Miss Nielsen weaves pretty clumsily into a thriller ..." (JS)
DEAD MARCH FOR PENELOPE BLOW <i>by GEORGE BELLAIRS</i> (MACMILLAN, \$2.50)	"... well-constructed plot rich in puzzlement ... Complex, humorous ... probably Bellairs' best ..." (AB)	"... one of his most careless efforts ... static but often ingratiating ..." (JS)
THE LONG WAIT <i>by MICKEY SPILLANE</i> (DUTTON, \$2.50)	"... may rank as the best Spillane ... faintest praise this department has ever bestowed." (AB)	"Readers will look without success for any hint of intentional satire." (JS)

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

"... one of Mrs. Holding's most merciful portraits. B plus." (LGO)	"... another gem-like Holding ... Holding's magic is peculiarly her own." (DBH)	KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES AB: <i>Anthony Boucher in The New York Times</i> FC: <i>Frances Crane in The Evansville Press</i> SC: <i>Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review of Literature</i> DBH: <i>Dorothy B. Hughes in The Los Angeles Daily News</i> LGO: <i>Lenore Glen Offord in The San Francisco Chronicle</i> KS: <i>Kathleen Sproul in The Saturday Review of Literature</i> JS: <i>James Sandoe in The New York Herald Tribune</i> Errata: <i>In the February Directory, two quotes — one on THE LONG DIVORCE, by Edmund Crispin, and one on ALTHEA, by Margaret McDonnell — were incorrectly attributed to James Sandoe. Both of these extracts were from unsigned reviews in The New York Herald Tribune.</i>
"Excellent background in this lively tale, enjoyable ... B plus." (LGO)	"... fine suspense, neat humor, vivid action ... Very good." (SC)	
"This unique book combines facts about poisons with mystery fiction using poisons ... Highly recommended." (FC)	"78-page preface alone worth the price ... Admirable." (SC)	
"Quiet, relying on interplay of emotion rather than action, and full of solid characterization" (LGO)	"Deft characterization ... all-around intelligent handling. Good." (SC)	
"Unluckily the people ... don't seem quite real." (LGO)	"Characters, setting, treatment agreeably different ... Original, unusual." (SC)	
"... logic, good writing and an astonishingly tough-fibered approach." (LGO)	"Exciting and believable ... a few unexplained strands — but ... Don't miss." (KS)	
"... story telling ... relentlessly jocose, and the pace suits the composition ... in the title." (LGO)	"Detection plodding but effective; characters authentic ... humorous touches ... agreeable." (SC)	
"... murky and incredible plot and complete lack of taste, all as usual." (LGO)	"Amnesia angle handcuffs reader; plot turgid and violent" (SC)	

Another modern radio drama by John Dickson Carr, written for the program called "Suspense," and broadcast in 1943 by CBS. . . . In this adventure over the air waves, the part of Gerald Hawkstone was played by that distinguished actor, Roland Young, and the role of Hawkstone's secretary by that equally distinguished actress, Peggy Conklin . . . You will remember that The Man in Black, as narrator on "Suspense," warned his listeners weekly that "Suspense" was "compounded of mystery and suspicion, and dangerous adventure. In this series are tales calculated to intrigue you — to stir your nerves — to offer you a precarious situation and then withhold the solution until the last possible moment . . ."

THE CUSTOMERS LIKE MURDER

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

The Characters

GERALD HAWKSTONE *a famous detective-story writer*
 PATRICIA PHILLIPS *his secretary*
 DR. GEORGE ROBERTS *his professional consultant*
 MRS. ROBERTS *the doctor's wife*
 SLATS KELLY *an American gangster*
 BIG LOUIE MILLER *his henchman*

and LORD ALVANLEY, the Lord Chief Justice of England

On a hot summer night, in a village on the east coast of England, a famous writer of detective stories is dictating to his secretary. You have all heard of Mr. Gerald Hawkstone, author of MURDER ON THE WOOLSACK, ACONITE AT THE ADMIRALTY, WHO SHOT THE PRIME MINISTER? — and other thrillers which have kept you up past the midnight hour. You have followed the exploits of his celebrated character, Pendleton King, diplomat-detective. Gerald Hawkstone lives quietly at East Grinstead, with his friend Dr. Roberts nearby in case he

should need medical knowledge, and his pretty, if somewhat pert secretary, Miss Patricia Phillips. Gerald Hawkstone would be a happy man, even in wartime, if it were not for . . .
(Furious rattle of typewriter keys, ending in a decisive plink)

HAWKSTONE: Have you got all that, Miss Phillips?

PATRICIA: Yes, Mr. Hawkstone.

HAWKSTONE: Good! New paragraph.
(Typewriter carriage rattles back)

PATRICIA: Yes, Mr. Hawkstone.

HAWKSTONE: (*dictating tensely*) "At the head of the great banqueting table, comma, the Lord Chief Justice staggered to his feet." Period. "His face was a ghastly whitish color, and his eyes had become glassy." (*Typewriter stops*)

PATRICIA: Is he drunk, Mr. Hawkstone?

HAWKSTONE: (*With powerful restraint*) No, Miss Phillips. The Lord Chief Justice is *NOT* drunk.

PATRICIA: He sounds pretty cock-eyed to me.

HAWKSTONE: For your information, Miss Phillips, the Lord Chief Justice has just been poisoned, because he's discovered the identity of the master criminal. Is that clear?

PATRICIA: (*Resignedly*) Yes, Mr. Hawkstone. But I wish you wouldn't do it.

HAWKSTONE: Do what?

PATRICIA: In the last four books, Mr. Hawkstone, you have shot the Prime Minister, killed the Lord Chancellor with an axe, poisoned the Home Secretary, and blown up the First Lord of the Admiralty. Why don't you stop picking on the poor government and murder somebody else for a change?

HAWKSTONE: (*Sternly*) The Chancellor, Miss Phillips, was not murdered with an axe.

PATRICIA: No, Mr. Hawkstone?

HAWKSTONE: Definitely no. He was beamed with the Great Seal and found dead on the Woolsack. And there's another thing; Miss Phillips: whether you talk like this

because of a dense vacuum in what we will charitably call your mind . . .

PATRICIA: Really, Mr. Hawkstone!

HAWKSTONE: Or whether you are merely making what you might define as wisecracks . . . I don't know. *But I don't want any more of it.*

PATRICIA: (*Furious*) Just as you please, Mr. Hawkstone . . .

HAWKSTONE: I . . . I . . . Oh, Lord, where was I?

PATRICIA: "His face was a ghastly whitish color, and his eyes had become glassy."

HAWKSTONE: Sounds like *me*. All right! "A single choking cry escaped his lips, comma, and his body crumpled to the floor." Period. New paragraph. "With one swift stride Pendleton King had reached the fallen man."

PATRICIA: He can't have done that, Mr. Hawkstone.

HAWKSTONE: (*Dazed*) Who can't have done what?

PATRICIA: Pendleton King.

HAWKSTONE: What about him?

PATRICIA: On the last page, you had him sitting at the foot of the table. So he can't get there at one stride, unless you want him to sail across the room like a kangaroo.

HAWKSTONE: There are times, Miss Phillips, when I should like to poison *you*, and dance on your grave.

PATRICIA: (*Almost in tears*) I am only trying to help!

HAWKSTONE: All right! Change it!

Strike it out! (*Series of plops from typewriter*) "With hardly a second's delay" — how's that? — comma — "Pendleton King had reached the fallen man." Period. New paragraph — quote, "I feared it," comma, close quotes, "he muttered," period. Quote, "Note the rigidity of the muscles," exclamation point. "Note the characteristic odor which . . ."

PATRICIA: That won't *do*, Mr. Hawkstone.

HAWKSTONE: Why not?

PATRICIA: The poison you are using has no odor.

HAWKSTONE: (*Shaking*) Now there, Miss Phillips; you have really gone too far.

PATRICIA: I can't help that — it's true!

HAWKSTONE: (*On his dignity*) If you will permit the small vanity, I am noted for the correctness of my medical knowledge. Who is murdering the Lord Chief Justice, you or I?

PATRICIA: You are, but you might murder him properly. The poison hasn't got any odor!

HAWKSTONE: I say it *has*!

PATRICIA: And I say it *hasn't*!

HAWKSTONE: Listen, Miss Phillips. I propose to settle this rather childish dispute by going next door and asking Dr. Roberts. Will *that* convince you?

PATRICIA: It hasn't got any odor. And, anyway, the Lord Chief Justice wouldn't be mixed up in any such silliness as this.

HAWKSTONE: *Silliness?*

PATRICIA: Yes, I said silliness! Read your evening paper! . . . The Lord Chief Justice is sentencing some American gangster who got involved in a robbery over here. That's the sort of thing he really does.

HAWKSTONE: You're very fond of these gangster reports, aren't you?

PATRICIA: Yes! Because they're real!

HAWKSTONE: Real? . . . *Pfaa!*

PATRICIA: (*Furiously*) Don't you say *Pfaa* to me!

HAWKSTONE: I was merely remarking, Miss Phillips, that with your usual ingenuity you've sidetracked the argument. I am going to see Dr. Roberts. That's not necessary, of course. My own knowledge of poisons is as great as that of any doctor . . .

PATRICIA: Doctor! *Pfaa!*

HAWKSTONE: And kindly don't say *Pfaa* to me either. When I return, Miss Phillips, I hope to find you in a better frame of mind. Please observe that I—I at least!—have been able to keep my temper. *Excuse me!*

(*Door opens and slams violently*)

PATRICIA: (*Tearful*) All right, go on! See if *I* care!

(*Doorbell ringing and heavy door opened. Mrs. Roberts is elderly and motherly*)

MRS. ROBERTS: Good evening, Mr. Hawkstone!

HAWKSTONE: Good evening, Mrs. Roberts. May I come in?

MRS. ROBERTS: Of course! Mind the blackout curtain. My, isn't it hot and stuffy tonight? (*Door closes*)

HAWKSTONE: Rather close, yes. Is the doctor in?

MRS. ROBERTS: I'm afraid he isn't, Mr. Hawkstone, but I expect him back any minute.

HAWKSTONE: Out on a call?

MRS. ROBERTS: No, I'm almost certain he isn't, because that's his bag and stethoscope on the hall table. I think he's just gone up the road to get some tobacco.

HAWKSTONE: Do you mind if I wait?

MRS. ROBERTS: Not at all, but — you *will* excuse me if I run along? — I promised Mrs. Anderson I'd drop in, and I'm terribly late already.

HAWKSTONE: Don't let me detain you, Mrs. Roberts. Go right ahead.

MRS. ROBERTS: I'm afraid you'll have to wait in George's consulting-room. I've got most of the house dark so I could keep the windows open. You know which room it is?

HAWKSTONE: I could find it blind-folded.

MRS. ROBERTS: And I wonder if you'd take the bag and stethoscope, and leave them in the consulting-room? George is getting so careless, he lets them lie about anywhere!

HAWKSTONE: Bag. Stethoscope. As a matter of fact, I've always wanted to hang one of these things round my neck . . . like this. — Good night, Mrs. Roberts! (*Door opens*)

MRS. ROBERTS: Good night, Mr. Hawkstone. (*Door closes*)

HAWKSTONE: So what I write is "silliness," eh? And I don't know anything about poisons. And I call her "Miss Phillips" instead of "Patricia." And . . . consulting-room, yes. Door unfastened. . . . (*Door opens*) Lights on, and . . . Good Lord!

(*Big Louie Miller, an American gangster, has a deep, slow voice which speaks with painful effort*)

LOUIE: Come on in, Doc. Close the door.

HAWKSTONE: Who in Satan's name are you?

LOUIE: If you want to keep healthy, Doc, just do what you're told. Come on in and close the door. (*Door closes*)

HAWKSTONE: Is that by any chance a revolver you're pointing at me?

LOUIE: It ain't no cigarette case. I'm just warning you.

HAWKSTONE: Well, I'm hanged! I've done it a thousand times in stories, but I never thought . . .

LOUIE: (*Sharply*) And don't drop that junk you're carrying, either! You're gonna need it, Doc, when you come along with me.

HAWKSTONE: Come along with you . . . where?

LOUIE: Just to see a guy, that's all.

HAWKSTONE: To see a . . . wait a minute! You don't think I'm the doctor?

LOUIE: Now look, Doc, I ain't got any time for gags, see? The boss says to bring you. O.K., so I

bring you. There'll be a very sick man out there if you don't go.

HAWKSTONE: Yes, but there'll be a very dead man out there if I do go. I tell you, you're making a terrible mistake!

LOUIE: (*Snarling*) Now look, Doc . . . !

HAWKSTONE: My name is Hawkstone! I live next door. I'm not a medical man, and I never . . .

LOUIE: S-s-s-t! Listen!

(*Door opens and closes quickly*)

HAWKSTONE: Miss Phillips!

PATRICIA: Now then, (*Scathingly*)

Dr. Hawkstone! (*Hawkstone moans*)

I have brought you the second volume of Galt's FORENSIC MEDICINE.

HAWKSTONE: That's done it!

LOUIE: (*Softly*) So you ain't the doctor, eh? Just a real old-fashioned kiddie, ain't you?

(*Patricia screams*)

LOUIE: Better keep quiet, lady, if you know what's good for you!

PATRICIA: I know you! I've seen your picture! You're Big Louie Miller!

LOUIE: So I'm Big Louie Miller, am I?

HAWKSTONE: Better take it easy, Miss Phillips. . . .

PATRICIA: Listen, Mr. Hawkstone! Big Louie Miller and Slat Kelly — Slat Kelly is the gang leader — were supposed to be friends of this gangster who's on trial in London now. But I hadn't heard they were in England!

LOUIE: (*Softly*) No, lady, and neither has anybody else.

HAWKSTONE: (*Crooning*) "Down went McGinty to the bot-tom of the sea . . ."

LOUIE: Who is this dame, Doc? Your nurse?

HAWKSTONE: No! She's my secretary. She doesn't know anything about this!

LOUIE: She seems to know a whale of a lot about it, if you ask me. Come on, lady! You're goin' with us.

PATRICIA: Going . . . where?

LOUIE: Just for a little ride, 'lady. Just for a little ride.

Far out from the village, in flat and miry swampland where pools of stagnant water gleam under the moon, stands the old Rutherford house. It is a desolate place, on the track of Field-Marshal Goering's bombers when they cross the coastline. But there are no searchlights here, and no guns. Only the heat on the glimmering marshes, and the decaying, weatherboarded house, as a motorcar approaches, and . . .

LOUIE: Drive straight on, Doc, and round to the back of the house.

And remember: I still got this rod against the back of your neck.

HAWKSTONE: Think nothing of it, Louie. As a matter of fact, I'm rather enjoying this. All except the murder.

LOUIE: (*Suspiciously*) What murder? We ain't going to bump anybody off!

HAWKSTONE: Maybe not, old boy, but I am. Just wait till I get at your patient.

PATRICIA: I don't see how you can *joke* about this!

HAWKSTONE: I'm not joking, Miss Phillips. If Louie won't tell us what's wrong with the patient . . .

LOUIE: Never you mind the patient, Doc! Just drive around there, and . . . Whoa! (*Car stops*)

HAWKSTONE: So this is the enchanted castle, eh?

LOUIE: Climb out of here and walk ahead of me through that door. I got a flashlight.

HAWKSTONE: I hope you've got the house well blacked-out, Louie. If the police don't get you, the air-raid wardens will.

LOUIE: Forget it, Doc. We got this place so sealed up you can't hardly breathe inside. Get going!
(*Splashing footsteps and creak of old door*)

PATRICIA: In here?

LOUIE: That's it, lady. Go ahead, I'll close the door.
(*Hawkstone's foot strikes a metal object*)

LOUIE: What's the matter, Doc? Did you hit your funny-bone against something?

HAWKSTONE: Somebody left a big gallon can, oil or something, standing right here in the middle of the floor!

LOUIE: It's only cleaning fluid, Doc — that stuff they use to clean suits. The people that owned this joint left two gallons behind. Keep going!

PATRICIA: But where?

LOUIE: Right here, where the cur-

tain's hanging over the door. I want you to meet the boss. . . .
(*Slats Kelly is a small man with weak lungs. He is sharply intelligent and, under his surface friendliness, much meaner than Louie*)

SLATS: Howdy, Doc. Come right in. Glad to see you.

HAWKSTONE: (*Affably*) Glad to see you, old man. I imagine you're the celebrated Mr. Kelly?

SLATS: That's me, Doc. Slats Kelly to you. I'm glad to see you're taking this business nice and friendly. (*Changing his tone, viciously*) Louie! What's the idea in bringing the dame?

LOUIE: I couldn't help it, boss.

SLATS: No?

LOUIE: She's his nurse, see? She was with him, and she knew who I was!

SLATS: She did, eh?

PATRICIA: I don't know anything! All I want to do is go home!

SLATS: (*Silkily*) That's all right, sister. You'll go home — all nice and friendly — as soon as I've had a little talk with the doctor.

HAWKSTONE: A talk about what?

SLATS: We're not what you might call comfortable here, Doc. But we've got candles to burn, and canned food, and plenty of liquor, and a portable radio that works on a battery. So we manage to get along. You know what I mean?

HAWKSTONE: A talk about what?

SLATS: (*Confidentially*) That's it. That's what I'm going to tell you. We pulled a snatch, see?

HAWKSTONE: You . . . pulled a snatch?

PATRICIA: He means they kidnaped somebody!

SLATS: That's right, sister. *You* speak English.

HAWKSTONE: May I ask who was snatched?

SLATS: I'll tell you, Doc, because it'll hand you a big laugh. The guy we snatched was the big-shot you call the Lord Chief Justice.

HAWKSTONE: (*Staggered*) You . . . kidnaped the Lord Chief Justice?

LOUIE: We sure did, Doc. And his clerk too. They're in that room over there, and . . .

SLATS: Shut your trap, Louie.

LOUIE: I didn't mean nothing, boss — I only said . . .

SLATS: Did you hear me say to shut your trap?

LOUIE: O.K., boss!

HAWKSTONE: But look here! What / was the idea behind this — er — snatch?

SLATS: I'll tell you, Doc. We got a pal, see?

HAWKSTONE: Well?

SLATS: Dominic Forelli, his name is. He's up on a grand-larceny rap. And Forelli don't like Limey jails. He don't like 'em *at* all. Besides, the dirty little rat owes me fourteen G's. So what do we do?

HAWKSTONE: You kidnap the Lord Chief Justice, apparently. But why?

SLATS: Because the mouthpiece back home tells me — long ago! — that a man can't be sentenced except by the judge that tried him.

HAWKSTONE: And the Lord Chief Justice is the judge who tried Dominic Forelli. Is that it?

SLATS: That's right, Doc. But it ain't the main thing. This Chief Justice is a pretty important guy, see? So what do we do? We write to the cops and say, "Now look. We've got the old bird in a place where you'll never find him. If you want to keep things nice and friendly, just spring Dominic Forelli —"

HAWKSTONE: Spring him?

PATRICIA: Turn him loose!

SLATS: Sure. "Spring Forelli, and you'll get the old judge back in one piece. If you don't do it, you'll get him back with his head as full of holes as a Swiss cheese. And we're not kidding."

HAWKSTONE: You know, Slat, I admire you tremendously.

SLATS: You do, Doc? Why?

HAWKSTONE: Because you've invented a crazier idea than *I* ever did.

SLATS: Just what do you mean by that crack, Doc?

HAWKSTONE: You don't honestly think the government will make a bargain with you?

SLATS: I sort of think they will, Doc! I sort of think they will!

HAWKSTONE: But what if they don't?

SLATS: Then it'll be just too bad for a lot of people. You know what I mean?

LOUIE: (*Savagely*) Wouldn't *I* like to give that judge a going-over, though!

SLATS: Louie's got a sort of a grudge against the old guy, Doc.

LOUIE: Well? Wouldn't *you* have?

SLATS: Louie's temperamental, see?

He gets bored easy. So he says to the old guy and his clerk, he says, "Can you play poker?" And the judge says, "Sure." So they play poker from six in the evening to five in the morning and cheese if the old judge don't win all Louie's dough!

LOUIE: They rung in a cold deck on me, that's what they done!

SLATS: Shut up, Louie! . . . Not that I blame Louie, much. The things *I've* had to take from that judge. . . . Well, that's where *you* come in, Doc.

HAWKSTONE: I was just wondering about that. Which one is. . . ?

SLATS: Hurt? There's nobody hurt. Not yet.

HAWKSTONE: Then what the devil do you want with *me*?

SLATS: I want 'em kept quiet, so they don't keep trying to escape! We can't get tough with 'em, not till I get Forelli and my fourteen G's. I want you to give 'em a hypodermic of something that'll keep 'em out cold for two days. Can you do that?

HAWKSTONE: Yes, I — I suppose I could.

SLATS: What would you use to dope 'em?

HAWKSTONE: Under the circumstances, and considering all the factors involved, I think I should use . . . morphine.

SLATS: Have you got any morphine in that black satchel?

HAWKSTONE: Oh, yes. Plenty of morphine. I always go about equipped for these little emergencies.

SLATS: Then open the satchel. (*Slight pause*) Go on, open it!

HAWKSTONE: There you are.

SLATS: Which of them bottles is the one that has morphine in it?

HAWKSTONE: I . . . The fact is, Slats, I . . .

SLATS: Come on! Which one is it!

LOUIE: (*Urgently*) Listen, boss!

SLATS: How many times, Louie, do I have to tell you to shut up?

LOUIE: But the midnight news — the news on the radio! You said you wanted to hear it!

SLATS: Why didn't you tell me, you big lug?

LOUIE: It's all right, boss, I've switched the radio on.

SLATS: Keep quiet, all of you. (*Gloating*). In a couple of seconds, now, you're going to hear some mighty sweet news.

HAWKSTONE: I wonder.

PATRICIA: So do I.

SLATS: Quiet!

(*Slight pause; then a B.B.C. voice*)

ANNOUNCER: . . . who this morning received a note from the kidnapers of Lord Alvanley, the Lord Chief Justice.

LOUIE: (*Whispering*) That's us, ain't it?

SLATS: Quiet!

ANNOUNCER: The kidnapers, stated Superintendent Hadley of the

C.I.D., seem to entertain a belief that no sentence can be passed on a criminal except by the judge who tried him. Whatever may be the law in certain American states, this is not the case here. Dominic Forcelli, alias Dominic Stevens, was today sentenced by Mr. Justice Stoneman to fourteen years' hard labor, and this evening entered Dartmoor Prison. One moment, please.

LOUIE: Take it easy, boss!

PATRICIA: (*Whispering*) Look at Slats Kelly! He's as white as a ghost, and his mouth is twisting back as though . . .

ANNOUNCER: Here is a bulletin just received. Scotland Yard Flying Squad cars, assisted by the constabulary of a county which for obvious reasons cannot be named, are closing in on the two kidnapers, believed to be men already wanted in the United States for murder. Will anyone who has further information about these men, whose descriptions follow, communicate with New Scotland Yard, telephone number Whitehall one-two-one-two, and . . .

(*A click; voice stops*)

LOUIE: Don't bust the radio, boss! Don't throw it against the wall! (*A rattling crash and a thud*)

SLATS: There!

LOUIE: (*Reproachfully*) You hadn't ought to 'a' busted the radio, boss!

Now we can't get any more news.

SLATS: We've had our news, ain't we?

HAWKSTONE: (*Under his breath*) Pa-

tricia . . . you see I can call you that.

PATRICIA: Why couldn't you have called me that weeks ago?

HAWKSTONE: Putting that aside, I started this as half a joke. But I'm not joking now. I intend to get that rat-faced Slats if it's the last thing I do.

PATRICIA: It probably will be. But *how* are you going to . . .

HAWKSTONE: Trust Pendleton King, my dear.

SLATS: (*Tensely*) Forelli — in stir. Fourteen thousand bucks — gone. And the cops on our tail while we stand here yapping. You heard what the radio said, Louie?

LOUIE: I heard it, all right. Look, boss! We better lam out of here!

SLATS: Sure we will, Louie. But not before we've settled things with that old guy in the other room.

HAWKSTONE: (*Sharply*) You can't get away with it, Louie! This is England. They'll hang you!

SLATS: So what? We got a murder rap to face back home, ain't we? And I'd just as soon hang as fry.

LOUIE: You said it, boss. Let me take this rod of mine and stick it against the back of the old guy's head and . . .

SLATS: Oh, no, Louie. No rods. That's too easy.

LOUIE: (*Puzzled*) Easy?

SLATS: Sure. One slug and it's all over. This guy rates a special treatment, and that's where the doc comes in. Know anything about poisons, Doc?

HAWKSTONE: I know a good deal about poisons. The customers *like* murder.

SLATS: (*Sharply*) What's that?

HAWKSTONE: Nothing. Just a slogan in my profession.

SLATS: Look, Louie. Do you remember the time Johnny Presco was running the old Third Avenue Social Club? And Mike Delaney talks out of turn? And they feed him some white stuff called strychnine, and sit around and light cigarettes and watch him die? It took four hours, Doc, and you could hear the rat screaming as far as Eighty-first Street.

HAWKSTONE: Now wait a minute, Slats! You can't . . .

SLATS: I can if you help me, Doc. Have you got any of that stuff?

HAWKSTONE: I . . . I . . .

SLATS: You've got *something* in that black bag that'll make the old guy squeal. Now haven't you?

HAWKSTONE: Yes, I suppose I have.

SLATS: You can do it the hard way, Doc, or you can do it the easy way. If Louie gets to work on you, maybe you'd be smarter to hand over the stuff right now. What do you say?

HAWKSTONE: I . . .

LOUIE: Listen, boss! Listen!

(*They hear the throb of heavy bombing planes in the distance*.)

HAWKSTONE: What's the matter, Slats? Troubled by the heat? It *is* hot in here.

SLATS: That sounds like planes!

HAWKSTONE: It *is* planes.

LOUIE: British planes goin' to bomb Germany?

HAWKSTONE: No such luck, old boy. German planes coming to bomb here. About . . .

PATRICIA: About a dozen Heinkels, flying twenty thousand feet up.

HAWKSTONE: That's only the first wave, Slats. There'll be another wave in a minute or two. But you needn't be alarmed. They're going somewhere else. They only . . .

(*The whistle of a bomb*)

SLATS: Duck, everybody! Duck!

(*The bomb lands*)

HAWKSTONE: Only a little visiting card, Slats, and fully a quarter of a mile away. Why bother?

SLATS: Blow out the candle, Louie, and pull back that curtain off the window!

LOUIE: But, boss, I . . .

SLATS: Do what I tell you.

LOUIE: O.K., boss! . . . But you can't see a thing! The sky's as black as pitch, except . . .

SLATS: Well? What is it?

LOUIE: It's a light, boss. A funny kind of white light, up over the trees, and not very steady. Like as if it started and dimmed, and started and dimmed. . . .

PATRICIA: Only a basket of incendiary bombs, Louie. Does that mean anything to you, Louie?

HAWKSTONE: (*Under his breath*) Incendiaries, eh?

PATRICIA: (*Under her breath*) What is it, Gerald? Have you got an idea?

SLATS: You want to know whether it means anything to me, sister? It

sure does! It means them Scotland Yard cars are going to get held up until we can settle things with those guys in the other room. Come along with me, Doc!

HAWKSTONE: (*Sharply*) Why don't you two lugs get smart?

PATRICIA: Gerald!

HAWKSTONE: You don't want to have your neck cracked on a rope, do you? Or burn in the electric chair back home? All right! Why not take advice from somebody who's been killing people, in a professional way, for fifteen years?

SLATS: I'm listening, Doc.

HAWKSTONE: This Lord Chief Justice and his clerk . . . what do they look like?

SLATS: The judge is a little guy with a bald head, like me, and the other one is a big guy with a punch-drunk pan, like Louie. Why?

HAWKSTONE: I thought so. I've seen their photographs. When the next wave of planes comes over — and it will — why shouldn't an incendiary bomb hit this house?

LOUIE: How are you going to make it hit the house?

SLATS: Be quiet, Louie!

HAWKSTONE: In other words, put those two to sleep with dope and then set fire to the place. "Justice cheated. American gangsters die in blaze."

PATRICIA: (*Under her breath*) Gerald Hawkstone, have you gone crazy?

HAWKSTONE: They may catch you eventually, yes. But it'll give you

a few days' start. And it's got to look good, mind! This house must go up like paper in a furnace.

SLATS: Yeah, and that's the catch.

HAWKSTONE: Why so?

SLATS: This house is in the middle of a swamp, see? It's as damp as Lake Michigan. You couldn't make it burn with a blow-torch.

HAWKSTONE: Oh, yes, you could. Aren't you forgetting the cleaning fluid?

SLATS: (*Puzzled*) Cleaning fluid?

HAWKSTONE: In that other room you've got two gallons of cleaning fluid. That's benzine, a derivative of petrol. There's a big room back there. Soak every inch of the floor with it — every inch of it, mind! — and the place will go up like tinder.

SLATS: Light the candle, Louie.

LOUIE: O.K., boss.

SLATS: And what about you two, Doc? Afterwards?

HAWKSTONE: We're accessories, aren't we? Are *we* likely to talk?

LOUIE: Better put a couple of slugs in 'em, boss, and drop 'em on the road!

SLATS: Maybe you're right at that. Anyway, Doc, thanks for a swell idea. — You heard what the doc said, Louie. Get going with that cleaning stuff!

HAWKSTONE: Both of you had better do it, I'm warning you!

SLATS: Why?

(*Another wave of bombing planes is heard faintly*)

HAWKSTONE: Because there isn't much time! You can't have a fire start *after* the last wave of planes has gone over.

SLATS: Maybe you've got something there, Doc. But I'll just take a little precaution first.

PATRICIA: What are those things you have there?

SLATS: Handcuffs, sister. Two of the neatest pairs of cuffs we ever swiped off a dumb cop in Limehouse. I'll just lock your arms round the back of the chair . . . (*Click of handcuffs*) . . . And the doc's arms round the back of his chair, like this and we'll get going. Come on, Louie!

LOUIE: I'm comin', boss. 'Bye, 'bye, Mr. Hawkstone and lady friend. Be seein' you in the funny papers — or in the morgue.

PATRICIA: Mr. Hawkstone, I know you can't be as *completely* crazy as you seem.

HAWKSTONE: Many thanks, my dear, for the qualification.

PATRICIA: I know you've got *some* kind of scheme. But — can you do it?

HAWKSTONE: I don't know, my dear. I did it in a story once and it worked very well then.

PATRICIA: You and your stories!

HAWKSTONE: Me and my stories, as Louie would put it, may save our hides yet.

PATRICIA: But suppose it *doesn't* work?

HAWKSTONE: Then we're done for. But we're done for anyway so what can we lose?

PATRICIA: What *are* you planning to do?

HAWKSTONE: (*Desperately*) It's not working, Patricia. But it's *got* to work!

PATRICIA: *What's* got to work?

HAWKSTONE: It's four — no five, minutes! That's my guess. They've been pouring out that benzine, an inch at a time, all over the floor. . . . listen!

SLATS: (*off*) What's the matter, Louie?

LOUIE: (*Faintly*) Boss, I . . .

SLATS: What's the matter, you big lug? Can't you stand up?

LOUIE: Something's got me, boss. I . . .

HAWKSTONE: It's working, Patricia! I think our roughneck friends are licked!

PATRICIA: (*Terrified*) No, they're not! Slats is coming back!

SLATS: (*Coming in, hoarse and dazed*) What dirty trick are you trying to pull, Doc? What's the matter with Louie? What's the matter with *me*?

HAWKSTONE: You've lost the game, Slats.

SLATS: (*Choking*) So I've lost, have I?

HAWKSTONE: It's the benzine fumes, old man. To pour out a lot of cleaning fluid for several minutes in an airtight room is practically certain death. You ought to read more about crime.

SLATS: You dirty rat, I'll . . .

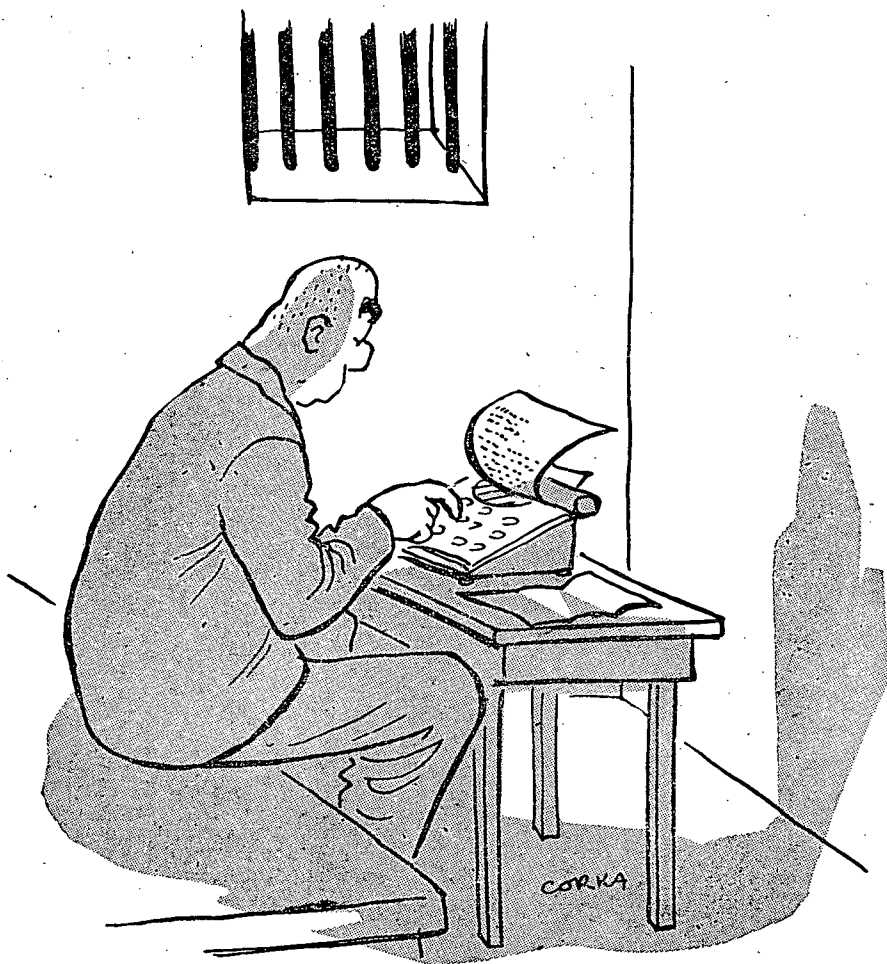
HAWKSTONE: No, old man. You can't
reach for your gun —

SLATS: I . . . I . . .

HAWKSTONE: You can't see straight.

The fumes have got you. You can't
move your arms or legs. *You're
going to die, Slats!*

*(A cry from Slats and a thud of
his body falling) (Music up)*



"Dear Secretary of the Class of '26"

FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY

by IRVIN S. COBB

JUST OUTSIDE A SIZABLE NEW Mexico town the second section of the fast through-train coming from the Coast made a short halt. Entering the stretch leading to the yards, the engineer had found the signal set against him; the track ahead was temporarily blocked.

It was a small delay though. Almost at once the semaphore, like the finger of a mechanical wizard, made the warning red light vanish and a green light appear instead; so, at that, the Limited got under way and rolled on into the station for her regular stop.

But before she started up, four travelers quitted her. They got out on the off side, the side farthest away from the town, and that probably explains why none of the crew and none of the other passengers saw them getting out. It helps also to explain why they were not missed until quite some time later.

Their manner of leaving her was decidedly unusual. First, one of the vestibule doors between the third sleeping-car and the fourth sleeping-car opened and the trap in the floor flipped up briskly under the pressure of an impatient foot on the operating lever. A brace of the departing ones came swiftly into view, one behind the other. True, there was nothing unusual about that. But as they

stepped down on the earth they faced about and received the figure of a third person whose limbs dangled and whose head lolled back as they took the dead weight of him into their arms. Next there emerged the fourth and last member of the group, he being the one who had eased the limp figure of Number Three down the car steps into the grasp of his associates. For a fractional space their shapes made a little huddle in the lee of the vestibule. Looking on, you might have guessed that there was a momentary period of indecision touching on the next step to be taken.

However, this muddle—if that was what it was—right away straightened itself out. Acting with movements which seemed difficult and awkward, the two burden bearers carried their unconscious load down the short embankment and deposited it on the cindery underfooting close against the flank of the slightly built-up right of way.

Number Four bent over the sprawled form and fumbled at it, shoving his hands into first one pocket and then another. In half a minute or less he straightened up and spoke to the remaining pair, at the same time using both hands to shove some article inside the vent of his waistcoat. He did it awkwardly.

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"I have got them," he said, speaking with a foreign accent. They pressed toward him, their hands extended.

"Not here and not yet, Señores," he said sharply. "First we make sure of the rest: First you do as I do."

Thereupon he hopped nimbly up the shoulder of the roadbed and headed toward the rear of the halted train, slinking well in under the overhang of the Pullmans. His mates obeyed his example. They kept on until they had passed the tail coach, which was a combination coach, and then they stepped inward between the rails, still maintaining their single-file formation. Immediately the dusk swallowed them up.

There was something peculiar about the way each one of these three plodding pedestrians bore himself. The peculiarity was this: He bore himself like a person engaged in prayer—in a silent perambulating act of piety. His head was tucked in, his face turning neither to the right nor left; his eyes were set steadfastly forward as though upon some invisible goal, his hands clasped primly together in front of him.

Thus and so the marching three plodded on until the train, having got in motion, was out of sight beyond a curve in the approach to the station. Then they checked and came together in a clump, and then, had you been there, you would have understood the reason for their devotional pose. All three of them were wearing handcuffs.

The man who had spoken before unpalmed a key ring which he was carrying. Working swiftly even in the half-darkness, he made tests of the keys on the ring until he found the proper keys. He freed the wrists of his two fellows. Then one of them took the keys and unlocked his set of bracelets for him.

He, it would seem, was the most forethoughted of the trio. With his heel he kicked shallow gouges in the gritty soil beside the track and buried the handcuffs therein.

After that they briefly confabbed together, and the upshot of the confab was that, having matched for the possession of some object evidently held to be of great value, they separated forces.

One man set off alone on a detour to the southeast, which would carry him around the town. His late companions kept on in a general westerly direction, heading toward the desert which all that day they had been traversing. They footed it fast, as men might foot it who were fleeing for their lives and yet must conserve their strength. As a matter of fact, they were fleeing for their lives. So likewise the one from whom they had just parted was fleeing for his life.

It was partly by chance that these three had been making the transcontinental journey in company. Two of them, Lafitte the Frenchman, and Verdi the Italian who had anglicized his name and called himself Green, met while lying in jail at San Fran-

cisco awaiting deportation to their respective countries. Within a space of a month each had been arrested as a refugee from justice; the formalities for extraditing the pair of them were swiftly completed.

So, to save trouble and expense, to kill, as it were, two birds with one stone, the authorities decided to send them together across to the Eastern seaboard where, according to arrangements made by cable, they would be surrendered to police representatives coming from abroad to receive them and transport them back overseas. For the long trip to New York a couple of city detectives had them in custody.

When the train bearing the officers and their charges reached a junction in lower California where the main line connected with a branch line running south to the Mexican border, there came aboard a special agent of the Department of Justice who had with him a prisoner.

This prisoner was one Manuel Gaza, a Spaniard. He also recently had been captured and identified; and he also was destined for return to his own land. It was not by prior agreement that he had been retransferred at this junction point to the same train which carried the Italian and the Frenchman. It just happened so.

It having happened so, the man who had Gaza in tow lost no time in getting acquainted with his San Francisco brethren. For a number of reasons it seemed expedient to all the officers that from here on they should

travel as a unit. Accordingly the special agent talked with the Pullman conductor and exchanged the reservations he previously had booked for a compartment adjoining the drawing-room in which the four from the city were riding.

It was on a Friday afternoon that the parties united. Friday evening, at the first call for dinner, the three officers herded their three prisoners forward to the dining car, the passage of the sextet through the aisles causing some small commotion. Their advent into the diner created another little sensation.

Since it was difficult for the handcuffed aliens to handle knife and fork, they were given such food as might readily be eaten with a spoon or with the fingers — soups and omelets and soft vegetables and pie or rice pudding. The detectives ate fish. They shared between them a double order of imported kippers.

Presumably they were the only persons on the train who that day had chosen the kippered herrings. Shortly, the special agent was giving private thanks that his church prescribed no dietetic regulations for Friday, because within an hour or two after leaving the table, the San Francisco men were suffering from violent cramps — ptomaine poison had them helpless.

One seemed to be dangerously ill. That night near the border between California and Arizona he was taken off the train and carried to a hospital. During the wait at the station, a local

physician dosed the second and lesser sufferer, whose name was McAvoy, and when he had been somewhat relieved, the doctor gave him a shot of something in the arm and said he ought to be up and about within twenty-four hours.

Through the night McAvoy slept in the lower berth of the compartment and the special agent sat up, with the communicating door open, to guard the aliens, who were bedded in the so-called drawing-room.

Their irons stayed on their wrists; their lone warden was accepting no foolish odds against himself. He had taken the precaution to transfer the keys of the Frenchman's handcuffs and the Italian's handcuffs from McAvoy's keeping to his own, slipping them on his key ring, but this had been done in case McAvoy should become seriously ill en route and it should devolve upon him to make a lap of the journey single-handed.

Next morning McAvoy was much easier but he felt weak, he said, and drowsy. Given a full twelve hours of rest, though, he thought he would be able to go on guard at nightfall.

So he lay in his berth, and the special agent occupied an end of the drawing-room sofa. The trapped fugitives sat smoking cigarettes, and when the officer was not too near, talking among themselves.

Mainly they talked in English, a language which Gaza the Spaniard and Lafitte the Frenchman spoke fairly well. Verdi, or Green, as the

case might be, had little English at his command, but Gaza, who had spent three years in Naples, spoke Italian; and so when Verdi used his own tongue, Gaza could interpret for the Frenchman's benefit. They were allowed to quit the drawing-room only for meals.

When dinner hour came on that second evening of their trip, McAvoy was in a doze. So the Department of Justice man did not disturb him.

"Come on, boys," he said to the three aliens; "time to eat again."

He lined them up in front of him in the corridor and they started the regular processional. It was just at that moment that the train broke its rhythmic refrain and began to clack and creak and slow for that unscheduled stop outside that New Mexico town. By the time they had reached the second car on ahead, she'd almost stopped and was lurching and jerking.

In the vestibule beyond that second car the special agent was in the act of stepping across the iron floor lip of the connection when a particularly brisk joggle caused him to lose his hat. He gave a small exclamation and bent to recover it. Doing so, he jostled Gaza, the third man in the line and therefore the next to him.

The agile Spaniard was quick to seize his chance. He half turned, and bringing his chained wrists aloft, sent them down with all his might on the poll of the officer's unprotected skull. The victim of the assault never made a sound — just spraddled on his face and was dead to the world.

No outsider had been witness to the assault. No outsider came along during the few seconds which were required by the late prisoners to open an off-side car door and make their escape after the fashion which already has been described for you. Nobody missed them — for quite a while nobody did.

It wasn't until nearly nine o'clock, when McAvoy had roused up and rung for the porter and begun to ask questions, that a search was made and an alarm raised.

Penned up together through that day, the aliens had matched stories, one story against another. A common plight made them communicative; a common peril caused each to turn with morbid reiteration to his own fatal predicament.

Said the Frenchman to the Spaniard: "He" — indicating his recent cellmate, the Italian — "he knows how with me it stands. With him, I have talked. He speaks not so well the English but sometimes he understands it. Now you shall hear and judge for yourself how bad my situation is."

Graphically, this criminal sketched his past. He had been a Marseilles dock hand. He had killed a woman. She deserved killing, so he killed her. He had been caught, tried, convicted, condemned. While lying in prison, with execution day only a few weeks distant, he had made a getaway.

In disguise he had reached America and here had stayed three years. Then

another woman, in a fit of jealousy, betrayed him to the police. He had been living with that woman; to her he had given his confidence. It would appear that women had been his undoing.

"Me, I am as good as dead already. And what a death!" A spasm of shuddering possessed him. "For me the guillotine is waiting. The devil invented it. It is so they go at you with that machine: They strap you flat upon a board. Face downward you are, but you can look up, you can see — that is the worst part. They fit your throat into a grooved shutter; they make it fast. You bring your head back; your eyes are drawn upward, fascinated. Above you, waiting, ready, poised, your eyes see the — the knife."

"But only for a moment do you see it, my friend," said the Spaniard, in the tone of one offering comfort. "Only a moment and then — *pouff* — all over!"

"A moment! I tell you it is an eternity. It must be an eternity. Lying there, you must live a hundred lives, you must die a hundred deaths. And then to have your head taken off your body, to be all at once in two pieces. Me, I am not afraid of most deaths. But that death by the guillotine — ah-h!"

The Spaniard bent forward. He was sitting alone facing the other two, who shared a seat.

"Listen, Señor," he stated. "Compared with me, you are the lucky one. True, I have not yet been tried —

before they could try me I fled away out of that accursed Spain of mine."

"Not tried, eh?" broke in the Frenchman. "Then you have yet a loophole — a chance for escape."

"You do not know the Spanish courts. It is plain you do not, since you say that," declared the Spaniard. "Those courts — they are greedy for blood. With them, to my kind, there is not mercy; there is only punishment."

"And such a punishment! Wait until you hear. To me when they get me before them they will say: 'The proof is clear against you; the evidence has been thus and so. You are adjudged guilty. You took a life, so your life must be taken. It is the law.'"

"Perhaps I say: 'Yes, but that life I took swiftly and in passion and for cause. For that one the end came in an instant, without pain, without lingering, yes, without warning. Since I must pay for it, why cannot I also be made to die very quickly without pain?'"

"Will they listen? No, they send me to the garrote. To a great strong chair they tie you — your hands, your feet, your trunk. Your head is against a post, an upright. In that post is a collar — an iron band. They fit that collar about your neck. Then from behind you the executioner turns a screw."

"If he chooses he turns it slowly. The collar tightens, tightens, a knob presses into your spine. You begin to strangle. Oh, I have seen it myself! I know. You expire by inches! I am a

brave man, Señores. When one's time comes, one dies. But oh, Señores, if it were any death but that! Better the guillotine than that!"

He slumped back against the cushions.

It was the Italian's turn. "I was tried in my absence," he explained to the Spaniard. "I was not even there to make my defense — I had thought it expedient to depart. Such is the custom of the courts in my country. They try you behind your back."

"They found me guilty, those judges. In Italy there is no capital punishment, so they sentenced me to life imprisonment. It is to that — that — I now return."

The Spaniard lifted his shoulders; the lifting was eloquent.

"Not so fast," said the Italian. "You tell me you lived once in Italy. Have you forgotten what life imprisonment for certain acts means in Italy? It means solitary confinement. It means you are buried alive. They shut you away from everyone in a tight cell. It is a tomb, that is all. You see no one ever; you hear no voice ever. If you cry out, no one answers. Silence, darkness, darkness, silence, until you go mad or die."

"Can you picture what that means to one of my race, to an Italian who must have music, sunshine, talk with his fellows, sight of his fellows? It is in his nature — he must have these things or he is in torture, in constant and everlasting torment. Every hour becomes to him a year, every day a century, until his brain bursts asunder."

"Oh, they knew — those fiends who devised this thing — what to an Italian is a million times worse than death — any death. I am the most unfortunate one of the three of us. My penalty is the most dreadful."

The others would not have it so. They argued the point with him and with each other all through the day, and twilight found their beliefs unshaken.

Then, under the Spaniard's leadership, came their deliverance out of captivity. It was he who, on the toss-up, won the revolver which they had taken from the person of the senseless special agent. Also it was he who suggested to the Italian that for the time being, at least, they stick together. To this the Italian had agreed, the Marseilles man, Lafitte, already having elected to go on his own.

After the latter, heading east by south, had left them, the Spaniard said reflectively:

"He is optimistic, that one, for all that he seemed so gloomy and down-hearted today when speaking of that guillotine of his. He said he now had faith that he would yet dodge his fate. Five minutes after he is off that train he speaks of faith!"

"I cannot go quite so far," answered the Italian. "We are free, but for us there will be still a thousand dangers. So I have not much faith, but I have hope. And you, my friend?"

The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders. His shrug might mean yes or it

might mean no. Perhaps he needed his breath. He was going at a jog-trot down the tracks, the Italian alongside him.

Take the man who had faith. Set down as he was in a country utterly strange to him, this one of the fugitives nevertheless made steady progress. He got safely around and by the New Mexico town. He hid in the chaparral until daybreak, then took to a highway running parallel with the railroad.

A "tin canner," which is what they were beginning to call an itinerant motor tourist in those parts, overtook him soon after sunup and gave him a lift to a small way station some forty miles down the line. There he boarded a local train — he had some money on him; not much money but enough — and undetected, he rode that train clear on through to its destination a hundred miles or so farther along.

Other local trains carried him across a corner of Colorado and clear across Kansas. Some forty-eight hours later, he was a guest in a third-rate hotel on a back street in Kansas City, Missouri.

He stayed in that hotel for two days and two nights, biding most of the time in his room on the top floor of the six-story building, going down only for his meals and for newspapers. The food he had to have; the newspapers gave him information, of a sort, of the hunt for the three fugitives. It was repeatedly stated that all three were believed to be fleeing

together. That cheered Lafitte very much. It strengthened his faith.

But on the morning of his third day in this cheap hotel, when he came out of his room and went down the hall to ring for the elevator — there was only one passenger elevator in this hotel — he saw something. Passing the head of the stairs, which ended approximately midway of the stretch between the door of his room and the wattle iron door opening on the elevator well, he saw, out of the corner of one watchful eye, two men in civilian garb on the steps below him. They had halted there. Whether they were coming up or going down there was no way of telling. It seemed to him that at sight of him they ducked slightly.

He gave no sign of having seen them. He stilled an impulse to make a dash for it. Where was he to dash for, with the stairs cut off? He followed the only course open to him. Anyhow he told himself he might be wrong. Perhaps his nerves were misbehaving. Perhaps those two who seemed to be lurking just there behind him on those steps were not interested in him at all. He kept telling himself that, while he was ringing the bell, while he was waiting for the car to come up for him.

The car did come up and, for a wonder, promptly. Except for its shirt-sleeved attendant, it was empty. As Lafitte stepped in, he glanced sideways over his shoulder, making the movement casual — no sight of those two fellows.

He rode down, the only passenger for that trip, so there were no stops on the descent. They reached the ground floor, which was the office floor. The elevator came to a standstill, then moved up a foot or so, then joltingly down six inches or so, as the attendant, who was not expert, maneuvered to bring the sill of the car flush with the tiling of the lobby.

The delay was sufficiently prolonged for Lafitte to realize, all in a flash, he had not been wrong. Through the intervening grille of the shaft door he saw two more men who pressed close up to that door, who stared in at him, whose looks and poses were watchful, eager, prepared.

Up above and here below, he was cut off. There still was a chance for him, a poor one but the only one. If he could shoot the elevator aloft quickly enough, check it at the third floor or the fourth, say, and hop out, he might make a successful dart for the fire escape at the rear of the hotel — provided the fire escape was not guarded. In the space of time that the elevator boy was jockeying the car, he thought of this, and having thought it, acted on it.

Swinging his fist from behind with all his might, he hit that hapless fellow on the point of the jaw and deposited him, stunned and temporarily helpless, on his knees in a corner of the cage. Lafitte grabbed the lever, shoved it over hard, and up the shaft shot the car. Before he could get control of it, being unfamiliar with such mechanisms and in a panic besides, it

was at the top of the house. But then he mastered it and made it reverse its course, and returning downward he pulled the lever, bringing it toward him.

That was the proper notion, that gentler manipulation, for now the car, more obedient, was crawling abreast of the third-floor level. It crept earthward, inch by inch, and without bringing it to a dead stop he jerked up the latch of the collapsible safety gate, telescoped the metal outer door back into its folded-up self, and stooping low because the gap was diminishing, he lunged forward.

Now that elevator boy was a quick-witted, a high-tempered Irish boy. He might be half dazed but his instincts of belligerency were not asleep. He told afterward how, automatically and indignantly functioning, he grabbed at the departing assailant and caught him by one leg and for a fleeting moment, before the other kicked free, retarded him.

But by all that was good and holy he swore he did not touch the lever. Being down on all fours at the rear side of the slowly sinking car, how could he touch it? Why, just at that precise fraction of a second, the elevator should pick up full speed was a mystery to him.

But pick up full speed it did. And the Irish boy cowered down and screamed an echo to a still louder scream than his, and hid his eyes from the sight of Lafitte, with his head outside and his body inside the elevator,

being decapitated as completely and almost as neatly as though a great weighted knife had sheared him off at the neck.

Take the Spaniard and the Italian. Steadily they traveled westward for nearly all of that night which followed their evacuation from the Limited. It put desirable distance between them and the spot where they had dumped the special agent down. Also it kept them warm. This was summertime but on the desert even summer nights are chilly and sometimes downright cold. Before dawn, they came on a freight train waiting on a siding. Its locomotive faced west. That suited their book.

They climbed nimbly aboard a flat and snuggled themselves down behind a barrier of farm implements. Here, breakfastless but otherwise comfortable, they rode until nearly midday. Then a brakeman found them. Harshly he ordered them to get out of there.

Immediately though, looking at them where they squatted half hidden, his tone softened, and he told them he'd changed his mind about it and they could stay aboard as long as they pleased. On top of this, he hurried forward as though he might have important news for the engine crew.

They chose to get off. They had noted the quick start as of recognition which the brakeman had given. They figured — and figured rightly — that by now the chase for them was on and that their descriptions had been tele-

graphed back and forth along the line. The train was traveling at least twenty miles an hour, but as soon as the brakeman was out of sight, they jumped for it, tumbling like shot rabbits down the slope of the right of way and bringing up jarred and shaken in the dry ditch at the bottom.

Barring bruises and scratches, Green had taken no hurt, but Gaza landed with a badly sprained ankle. With Green to give him a helping arm, he hobbled away from the railroad.

To get away from that railroad was their prime aim now. Choosing a course at random, they went north over the undulating waste lands and through the shimmering heat, toward a range of mottled high buttes rising on beyond.

It took them until deep into the afternoon to cover a matter roughly of five miles. By now, Gaza's lower left leg was elephantine in its proportions and every forced step he took meant a fresh stab of agony. He knew he could not go much farther. Green knew it too, and in his brain began shaping tentative plans. The law of self-preservation was one of the few laws for which he had respect.

At the end of those five miles, having toiled laboriously up over a fold in the land, they saw close at hand, and almost directly below them, a 'dobe hut, and not quite so near at hand, a big flock of sheep. At the door of the cabin, a man in overalls was stripping the hide from a swollen dead cow.

Before they could dodge back below the sky line, he saw them and stood up expectantly. There was nothing for them to do except to go toward him. At their slow approach, an expression of curiosity crept over his brown face and stayed there. He looked like a Mexican or possibly a half-breed Indian.

When Gaza, stumbling nearer, hailed him in English, he merely shook his head dumbly. Then Gaza tried him in Spanish and to that he replied volubly. For minutes they palavered back and forth; then the stranger served them with deep draughts from a water bottle swinging in the doorway with a damp sack over it. The water was lukewarm and bitterish-tasting but it was grateful to their parched throats. Then he withdrew inside the little house and Gaza, for Green's benefit, translated into Italian what talk had passed.

"He says he is quite alone here, which is the better for us," explained the Spaniard, speaking swiftly. "He says that a week ago he came up from Old Mexico, seeking work. A gringo — a white man — gave him work. The white man is a sheepman. His home ranch is miles away. In a sheep wagon he brought this Mexican here and left him here in charge of that flock, with provisions for a month.

"It will be three weeks then before the white man, his employer, comes again. Except for that white man he knows nobody hereabouts. Until we came just now, he had seen no one at all. So he is glad to see us."

"And accounting for ourselves you told him what?" asked Green.

"I told him we were traveling across country in a car and that going down a steepness last night the car overturned and was wrecked and I crippled myself. I told him that, traveling light because of my leg, we started out to find some town, some house, and that, hoping to make a short cut, we left the road, but that since morning and until we blundered upon this camp, we had been quite lost in this ugly country. He believes me. He is simple, that one, an ignorant, credulous peon.

"But kind-hearted, that also is plain. For proof of it observe this." He pointed to the bloated, half-flayed carcass. "He says three days ago he found this beast—a stray from somewhere, he knows not where. So far as he knows there are no cattle droves in these parts—only sheep.

"She was sick, she staggered, she was dizzy and turned in circles as if blind, and froth ran from her mouth. There is a weed which does that to animals when they eat it, he says. So, hoping to make her well again, he put a scrap of rope on her horns and led her here. But last night she died. So today he has been peeling her. Now he goes to make ready some food for us. He is hospitable, also, that one."

"And when we have eaten, then what? We can't linger here."

"Wait, please, Señor. To my mind already an idea comes." His tone was authoritative, confident. "First we

fill our empty stomachs to give us strength, and then we smoke a cigarette, and while we smoke, I think."

On frijoles and rancid bacon and thin corn cakes and bad coffee, which the herder brought them on tin platters and in tin cups, they did fill their empty stomachs. Then they smoked together, all three of them, smoking cigarettes rolled in corn-husk wrappers.

The Mexican was hunkered on his heels, making smoke rings in the still, hot air when Gaza, getting on his feet with difficulty, limped toward the doorway, gesturing to show that he craved another swig from the water bottle. When he was behind the other two, almost touching them, he drew the special agent's pistol and fired once and their host tumbled forward on his face and spraddled his limbs and quivered a bit and was still, with a bullet hole in the back of his head.

This killing gave the Italian, seasoned killer as he was, a profound shock. It seemed so unnecessary, unless—? He started up, his features twitching, and backed away, fearing the next bullet would be for him.

"Remain tranquil, Señor," said the Spaniard, almost gayly. "For you, my comrade, there is no danger. There is for you hope of deliverance.

"Now me, I have charity in my soul—charity for you, charity for myself, charity also for this one lying here. Behold, he is now out of his troubles. He was a dolt, a clod of the earth, a creature of no refinement. He

lived a hermit's life, lonely, miserable. Now he has been dispatched to a better and a brighter world. That was but kindness.

"But in dispatching him I had thought also for you — for both of us. I elucidate: First we bury him under the dirt floor of this house, taking care to leave no telltale traces of our work. Then you make a pack for your back of the food that is here. You take also the water bottle, filled. Furthermore, you take this pistol.

"Then, stepping lightly on rocky ground or on hard ground so that you make no tracks, you go swiftly hence and hide yourself in those mountains until — who can tell? — until those who will come presently here have ceased to search for you. With me along, lamed as I am, me to hamper you, there would be no chance for either of us. But you, going alone — you armed, provisioned, quick of foot — you have a hope."

"But — but you? What then becomes of you? — You — you sacrifice yourself?" In his bewilderment the Italian stammered.

"Me, I stay here to greet the pursuers. It is quite simple. In peaceful solitude I await their coming. It cannot be long until they come. That man of the freight train will be guiding them back to pick up our trail. By tonight at latest I expect them."

At sight of the Italian's mystified face he broke now into a laugh.

"Still you are puzzled, eh? You think that I am magnanimous, that I am generous? Well, all that I am. But

you think me also a fool and there you err. I save you perhaps but likewise perhaps I save myself. Observe."

He stooped and lifted the dead face of his victim. "See now what I myself saw the moment I beheld this herder of ours: This man is much my shape, my height, my coloring. He spoke a corrupt Spanish such as I can speak. Put upon me the clothes which he wears, and remove from my lip this mustache which I wear, and I would pass for him even before the very eyes of that white man who hired him.

"Well, very soon I shall be wearing his clothes, my own being hidden in the same grave with him. Within ten minutes I shall be removing this mustache. He being newly shaven, as you see for yourself, it must be that in this hovel we will find a razor. I shall pass for him."

A light broke on the Italian. He ran and kissed the Spaniard, on both cheeks and on the mouth.

"Ah, my brother!" he cried out delightedly. "Forgive me that for a moment I thought you hard-hearted for having in seeming wantonness killed the man who fed us. I see you are brilliant — a great thinker, a great genius. But, my beloved" — and here doubt once more assailed him — "what explanation do you make when they do come?"

"That is the best of all," said Gaza. "Before you leave me you take a cord and you bind me most securely — my hands crossed behind my back — so; my feet fastened together — so. It will not be for very long that I

remain so. I can endure it. Coming then, they find me thus. That I am bound makes more convincing the tale I shall tell them.

"And this is the tale that I shall tell: To them I shall say that as I sat under this shelter skinning my dead cow, there appeared suddenly two men who fell upon me without warning; that in the struggle they hurt my poor leg most grievously; then, having choked me into quietude, they tied my limbs, despoiled me of my provender and hurriedly departed, leaving me helpless. I shall describe these two brutal men — oh, most minutely I shall describe them. And my description will be accurate, for you I shall be describing as you stand now; myself I shall describe as I now am.

"The man from the train will say: 'Yes, yes, that is true; those are surely the two I saw.' He will believe me at once; that will hold. Then they will inquire to know in which direction fled this pair of scoundrels and I will tell them they went that way yonder to the south across the desert, and they will set off in that direction, seeking two who flee together, when all the while you will be gone north into those mountains which will shelter you.

"Perhaps, though, they question me further. Then I say: 'Take me before this gringo who within a week hired me to watch his sheep. Confront me with him. He will identify me, he will confirm my story.' And if they do that and he does that — as most surely he will — why, then they

must turn me loose and that, Señor, will be the very crown of the joke."

In the excess of his admiration and his gratitude, the Italian just naturally had to kiss him again.

They worked fast and they worked scientifically, carefully, overlooking nothing, providing against every contingency. But at the last minute, when the Italian was ready to resume his flight and the Spaniard, smoothly shaven and effectually disguised in the soiled shirt and messy overalls of the dead man, had turned around and submitted his wrists to be pinioned, it was discovered that there was no rope available with which to bind his legs. The one short scrap of rope about the spot had been used for tying his hands.

The Spaniard said this was just as well. Any binding that was drawn snugly enough to fetter his feet securely would certainly increase the pain in the inflamed and grossly swollen ankle joint.

However, it was apparent that he must be securely anchored, lest suspicion arise in the minds of his rescuers when they arrived. Here the Italian made a contribution to the plot. He was proud of his inspiration.

With the Mexican's butcher knife he cut long narrow strips from the fresh slick cowhide. Then the Spaniard sat down on the earth with his back against one of the slim tree trunks supporting the arbor, and the Italian took numerous turns about his waist and his arms and the upper part of his body, and tightly knotted

the various ends of the skin ribbons behind the post. Unaided, no human being could escape out of that mesh. To the pressure of the prisoner's trunk, the moist, pliant lashings would give slightly but it was certain they neither would work loose nor snap apart.

So he settled himself in his bonds, and the Italian, having shouldered his pack, once more fervently kissed his benefactor in token of gratitude, wished him success and made off.

So far as this empty country was concerned, the Italian was a greenhorn, a tenderfoot. Nevertheless, he made excellent progress. He marched northward until dark, lay that night under a murdered man's smelly blanket behind a many-colored butte and next morning struck deeper into the broken lands. He entered what he hoped might be a gap through the mountains, treading cautiously along a narrow natural trail halfway up a dauntingly steep cliffside.

He was well into it when his foot dislodged a scrap of shaly rock which in sliding over the verge set other rocks to cascading down the slope. From above, yet larger boulders began toppling over into the scoured-out passageway thus provided, and during the next five minutes the walled-in declivity was alive and roaring with tumbling huge stones, with dislodged earth running fluid like a stream, with uprooted stumpy piñons, with choking dust clouds.

The Italian ran for dear life; he managed to get out of the avalanche's

path. When at length he reached a safe place and looked back, he saw behind him how the landslide had choked the gorge almost to its brim. No human being — no, not even a goat, could from his side scale that jagged and overhanging parapet. Between him and pursuit was a perfect barrier.

Well content, he went on. But presently he made a discovery, a distressing discovery which took the good cheer right out of him. This was no gateway into which he had entered. It was a dead end leading nowhere — what Westerners call a box canyon. On three sides of him, right, left and on ahead, rose tremendously high walls, sheer and unclimbable. They threatened him; they seemed to be closing in on him to pinch him flat. And, of course, back of him retreat was cut off. There he was, bottled up like a fly in a corked jug, like a frog at the bottom of a well.

Frantically he explored as best he could the confines of this vast prison cell of his. He stumbled upon a spring, and its waters, while tainted lightly with alkali, were drinkable. So he had water and he had food, some food. By paring his daily portions down almost to starvation point, he might make these rations last for months. But then, what? And in the meantime, what? Why, until hunger destroyed him, he was faced with that doom which he so dreaded — the doom of solitary confinement.

He thought it all out and then he

knelt down and took out his pistol and he killed himself.

In one of his calculations that smart malefactor, the Spaniard, had been wrong. By his system of deductions, the searchers should reach the 'dobe hut where he was tethered within four hours or, at most, five. But it was nearer thirty hours before they appeared.

The trouble had been that the brakeman wasn't quite sure of the particular stretch where he had seen the fugitives nestled beneath a reaping machine on that flat car. Besides, it took time to spread the word; to summon county officials; to organize an armed searching party. When at length the posse did strike the five-mile trail leading from the railroad tracks to the camp of the late sheep herder, considerably more than a day had elapsed.

The track was fairly plain — two sets of heavy footprints bearing north and only lacking where rocky outcrops broke through the surface of the desert. Having found it, they followed it fast, and when they mounted the fold in the earth above the cabin, they saw the figure of a man seated in front of it, bound snugly to one of the supports of the arbor.

Hurrying toward him they saw that he was dead — that his face was blackened and horribly distorted;

that his glazed eyes goggled at them and his tongue protruded; that his stiffened legs were drawn up in sharp angles of agony.

They looked closer and they saw the manner of his death and were very sorry for him. He had been bound with strands of fresh rawhide; and all through that day he had been sitting there exposed to the baking heat of the day.

Now heat, operating on damp new rawhide, has an immediate effect. Heat causes certain substances to expand but green rawhide it causes to contract very fast to an ironlike stiffness and rigidity.

So in this case the sun glare had drawn tighter and tighter the lashings about this poor devil's body, squeezing him in at the stomach and the breast and the shoulders, pressing his arms tighter and tighter and yet tighter against his sides. That for him would have been a highly unpleasant procedure but it would not have killed him.

Something else had done that. One loop of the rawhide had been twisted about his neck and made fast at the back of the post. At first it might have been no more than a loosely fitting circlet but hour by hour it had shrunk into a choking collar, a diminishing noose, a terrible deadly yoke. Veritably it had garroted him by inches.



“BEHIND AND BEYOND THE COMMONPLACE”

It wasn't until last summer that we first met Mabel Seeley, while she was visiting New York. One morning our phone rang and Mabel Seeley introduced herself and said she had heard a lot about the Queen collection of first editions, and would it be an imposition if she came out to browse in the Queen library and see some of the great detective rarities of the past? An imposition! We told her it would be a privilege and a pleasure. So that very afternoon she drove out, with her sister and Isabelle Taylor of Doubleday's, and we brought out some of our most cherished 'tec treasures — Voltaire and Vidocq in the original French; the sixth known copy of Poe's TALES in the full original wrappers; the first detective novel ever written — Gaboriau's L'AFFAIRE LEROUGE, in a French first edition that once belonged to a royal family; first editions of such classics as Wilkie Collins's THE MOONSTONE and Anna Katharine Green's THE LEAVENWORTH CASE; two famous 1887 books — Fergus Hume's THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB and the earliest appearance in print of Sherlock Holmes, in "Beeton's Christmas Annual"; the fabulous first book-edition of the great Sherlock; fragile dime novels and elaborate gift books and crude "vanity" publications . . . until all our heads swam.

Then, over late-afternoon tea, we asked Mabel Seeley if she had ever written any short stories. No, she said — and then she corrected herself. Yes, some years ago, she planned a series of modern-Gothic tales. One of her favorite authors, and the one she wanted most to emulate at that time, was Algernon Blackwood. She still has a deep love for Blackwood — "for his evocation of moods through which the reader comes to believe in a secret and meaningful other-life, behind and beyond the commonplace." Perhaps that's the kind of world she really wished existed . . . Anyway, Mabel Seeley wrote two short stories of this kind and sent them off to a literary agent, who promptly reported that the stories were much too off-trail and therefore unpublishable; no one, said the literary agent, cared for this sort of story any more. So Mabel Seeley sadly abandoned her modern-Gothic experiment and concentrated on work that was more on-trail.

"And what happened to those two short stories?" we asked.

"Why, I simply tore them up and threw them away," said Mabel Seeley. And then she paused.

And it was the kind of pause we had often heard before — the pause

that flashes a signal to our sixth sense and tells us that we are on the brink of a discovery. Hold your breath, sit still . . . and then we heard Mabel Seeley say: "No, that's not true — I didn't throw them away. I put them in an old box — yes, I remember now, an old box in the attic at my mother's house!"

And before Mabel Seeley left that day, we had her solemn promise that at the first opportunity she would explore her mother's attic, find that "travel-worn and battered" old box, and send us the manuscripts of her two modern-Gothic tales. And Mabel Seeley kept her promise.

So, here is Mabel Seeley's first short story to appear in print, and it won an award in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. The second story, by the way, will be published soon in F&SF, the fantasy and science fiction magazine edited by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas.

"The House That Nella Lived In" is altogether different, in theme and treatment, from Mabel Seeley's detective novels. It belongs to that criminological category that we like to call "Bedtime Stories" . . . but on second thought, perhaps you had better read it in the daytime, when the sun is shining and there are people around and the world about you seems within the boundaries of the commonplace.

THE HOUSE THAT NELLA LIVED IN

by MABEL SEELEY

STEVE KARAKAS WAS IN A SMALL town, mowing 'em down. The town's name was Maple Valley. It had exactly one beer joint, and that's where he was now, back to the bar, heel caught on the rail. Steve Karakas — short and quick and genial, and as ruthless as a bullet. Close around him the local boys leaned on each other, hair unstuck and ragging over their foreheads, eyes bugged. Punks, thought Steve, who didn't know a thing.

"So then we get down along Mex-

ico, see. May-hee-ko, they call it. Well, the boat stops at this dump for three hours, unloading, and I says to myself, in three hours I unload too. I hikes out along a main drag till I gets to this house, see, that has a balcony on it. With a dame. Young, black hair, big black lamps —"

At the important part a hoarse crow went up around him, of envy and second-hand pleasure. But naturally there was a heckler.

"I notice it happened a long ways off," this heckler said. He was a

burnt-nose kid, standing a little way off by himself up the bar. Taller than Steve, but he didn't have the muscle.

"Oh, yeah?" Steve asked, easy but letting his shoulders roll. "Wanna make something of it?"

"Heck, no," the kid said, throwing it smart. "I ain't no plug-ugly."

"You play it all your own way," Steve threw it back smarter. "I ain't so crazy about getting my fist into a red ripe tomato. I mean like that one out front of your face."

The nose went up quick and a good laugh broke out all around; oh, Steve knew how to handle 'em.

"Beer?" he asked. "Guess I'm good for another round. Talking about women always makes me thirsty."

A laugh went up on that one, too; when they'd got their beer they were friendly, relaxed. Now, thought Steve, was the right time.

"Ah, the heck with that stuff, anyways," he tossed in. "Me, I'm done with it. Gettin' old. Twenty-seven. What I'm doin' from here on is to settle down. Find some gal with the moola, and get hitched. Say a widda. How's this town fixed for widdas with dough?" This was as artless as the rest, his voice said; only his eyes spoke a difference.

The crowd went up again.

"A-ah, there's no dough in this burg."

"Sa-ay, who you kiddin'? We got old Mrs. Crunenback, ain't we? You'd go for old lady Crunenback, mister. Twenty thousand insurance. Eighty-six years old —"

"How about Mrs. Winty? Two farms. Kind of fat, maybe, but —"

"Yeah, and you wouldn't have to go out for her, neither! She'd go out for you!"

"Aw, have a heart, fellas," Steve cut it, still pretending it was no more than a joke. "Ain't there a little dough somewheres that ain't tied to witches?"

They all talked at once. Naw, they said; if there was, he didn't think it would be laying around for strangers, did he? But then in the middle of it the heckler with the red nose stuck in his oar again. Quiet and funny, as if he meant something different from what he was saying.

"We got Nella Melstrom," he said.

The other boys shut up quick, looking at their beer.

"She ain't a widow, exactly," the tall boy drawled it out. "But she's as close to rich as you'll find in this town. She ain't old, and she ain't bad looking, either."

The boys wore slammed doors in their faces.

"What's the matter?" Steve made it careful. "Her mama's a jungle snake?"

"Nope. Nella's an orphan."

"Your cast-off, huh?"

"Not mine. Sure, I went out with Nella a bit, once: I quit, though."

"You did, huh. Why'd you quit?"

"I just decided she wasn't quite safe for me, that's why."

"You decided — say, what are you, anyhow? A yellow-bellied — say, she wouldn't get *me* that way. What is

she, a weight-slinger? If you'd like to make a bet —"

"Why not? It could be fun, seeing this hot stuff you throw around."

Steve looked at the faces, now grown jeering, expectant, all turned to the other side.

"Nobody has to dare me twice't," he said. "Just you show me where this Nella hangs out."

The red-nosed boy loosened himself from the bar. "That's where you'll find Nella." At the front window of the bar, his pointing finger singled out a white house showing distantly against green-black pines, halfway up a bluffside, south beyond the village rim. "Yep, that's where you'll find Nella," the boy said it over. "Lives there alone, too. All alone, except for an old woman does up her house-work."

"Nella, just you wait for me, I'm comin'," Steve said.

"That's right, you go up. Nella won't mind," the boy said. "We'll be seeing you. Or then again, maybe we won't."

The crowd shuffled around, hanging back, but another boy said, "Sure, you go to it, hot stuff; we'll keep our eyes open."

"You'll get 'em full, all right," Steve promised, and that was that. He'd got what he wanted from them. Slamming into his beat-up convertible, parked handy in front of the beer joint, he shot fifty feet up the street to a café that said *Nelson's*.

"Say, you know any folks in this village named Melstrom?" he asked

the old geezer who dumped the pork chops down. The old gink was red, too, but only his hair had the color. His face was much paler, with freckles.

"Kin of yours?" the man asked, kind of short.

"My cousins, or something. My mom used to mention 'em. Maple Valley. I'm sure that's the town. Maple Valley."

"Just one girl left. That's Nella. Folks got killed in a car smash."

"Did, huh? Say, that's too bad. Only Nella left. Poor kid, hope she gets along."

"Oh, she gets along, Nella. Sold out her dad's bank. Good price, too, I guess."

Steve tried hard to get it. Good price. Her dad's bank. But the way she'd been put to him, there was a catch — there must be.

He inched it to Nelson, but Nelson clammed up. Well, nothing like seeing for yourself. It wasn't seven yet; he drove straight for the steep road that wound up the bluffside.

Halfway up, there was a grade where the pull of gravity at his front wheels was almost as much back as down; he had a half-sick thrill in the pit of his stomach. After that, the climb eased, turned, and brought him to a house with a porch.

The girl had cushions around her in a long chair, and she was reading. But when the car swung alongside she sat up, looking eager.

"Baby!" Steve said to himself, swearing it. He couldn't be seeing straight. This girl was as small as a

ten-year-old kid. She had a kid's face, too — funny, smiley, and blue-eyed. Blonde hair, pale and silky, pulled up at the sides and curled under in back. But plenty grown up, too. You saw that from her neck down.

"Baby, you're knocking me cold," he told her, and this time he wasn't swearing it. "I came up here to see a girl named Nella. Nella Melstrom. I didn't expect to run into anybody who would knock the sunspots off Jane Russell."

"Why, I'm Nella," the girl said, simple and surprised and even more eager, getting up to hold the porch screen open. "Who're you?" The way she put it she couldn't be anything but all-over small town — a girl who'd never been around one day, a girl who'd never catch on to a thing. He stuck out his hand.

"Why, Nella, hello! I guess I'm your cousin, a couple of times back. Steve Karakas, my name is; my mother used to say we had kin in these parts. Melstrom, she said; I remember that. Melstrom. So when I was driving through here —"

The kid smiled so all-over she wriggled.

"Isn't that funny? I can't remember dad ever — or mother — but there's nobody else here named Melstrom."

"I sure hope I'm not mistaken."

"You do?" She was so pleased with him he had a great big lift; he didn't have to get any farther along than this to know he'd have no trouble with her. No trouble at all!

"Do sit down," she was telling him. "No, not there. Here, by me. Have you lived near here?"

"I've lived everywhere, I guess." What more could he ask? He sat by her and began to spin it out. He took her to Rio and Agua Caliente; he took her to 'Frisco and Hollywood and a jail in Las Vegas and down into Panama City. He'd really been there and he could do 'em good; he left out the women and put in things he'd heard about; she sat right where she was until the August evening was dark, listening so close he almost had her ears in his teeth.

When it got ten or so, he pulled out of it, stretching and smiling at her.

"Shagging around, that's my stuff. I'm not much for sticking in one place."

"Why, it's late!" she said then, waking up. "And I've not even — I haven't even offered you a drink!"

He let her go, willing; when she came back she handed him a glass. Lemonade. Her idea of a drink. Lemonade. An old woman pattering after her offered him cookies.

"Martha, this is Steve Karakas. I've learned he's my cousin," Nella was chattering, while he got a good look at the woman. Short and fat, mouth pursed into a buttonhole. Sixty-five if a day.

"Hello, Martha," he greeted her, getting up, friendly, but the old dame beat it like a frightened rabbit. It gave him another big lift — that hag wouldn't bother him, either.

"You mustn't mind Martha," Nella

was telling him. "Her teeth hurt; she never does wear them except when she's eating. She's bashful."

"Say," he asked, pushing it. "Aren't you two afraid up here, all alone by yourselves? So far out?"

"Goodness, no." She stared at him, surprised, and laughed. "I can't be afraid here. My house looks after me."

"Your house — say, that's good!"

He waited, expecting her laugh again; instead, she said the thing over, in the simple way she said everything.

"My house is different from all other houses. I love it, and it loves me." She'd sat down with her lemonade, but the white-painted brick wall was where she could reach it; she stretched out to give the wall a little pat. "My house was built for me, didn't you hear of that? Dad and mother weren't married until I was born, but of course you know that much. Everyone around here would tell you. I hadn't been born long, though, when grandfather died, and daddy got the bank, and married mother and me. He built the house then. It's taken care of me ever since."

The catch. That was it — she was off her nut. For a minute his head stopped short; the wheels wouldn't spin around. Then when they did start up they moved in short jerks; his plans jolted around in his head. The muscles moved a little on his bones, too. Crazy people were something he'd always steered clear of; you never knew what they would do.

When he stared at her, though, he just couldn't believe it. There she sat, tiny and quiet, eyes shining in the moonlight, and after a while his muscles smoothed down a bit. Her size now — that made it safer. Just the same he wanted to get away a minute. Where he could think.

"Wish there was some house would look after me," he joked. "About now I could use a bed —"

"Mr. Nelson's got two rooms," she said, still all eager. "Oh, I hope —"

"At Nelson's? You mean — the café?" He was leaving it open.

"You've just got to stay a while," she urged, anxious, like any girl who wanted a boy friend. "You could eat with me — we'd picnic — we'd swim in the river —"

"Say, you make it sound good."

He still wasn't promising, and going down the bluff he drove slowly; that steep strip could give him the willies. Nelson wouldn't hurt him, though, and Nelson was glad enough to rent him a stuffy little room with a bed and a rocker and a dresser. Lying on the patchwork quilt with his shoes off, he got to thinking. He knew now what scared the boys. If Nella had heft to her — but she didn't. If she went on a tear he could take her down. With one hand. That stuff about the bank — good price, Nelson had said. Living alone the way she did, she should have hung onto all the dough. Stocks, bonds — something he could turn into cash in a hurry. He'd been bumming around now for seven months, since the last one, and

not finding a thing. That ear he'd got in Juarez wasn't helping him any, and his belly wasn't as flat as it once was — a man twenty-seven was getting along. Nella had looks, too. Cute and little. She'd fit his hands —

In the morning, roaring south past the beer joint, he kept his chest out and a grin on his face; no worry that the boys wouldn't have heard where he was last night, and how late he'd stayed; no worry they'd see where he went now. He'd show 'em who had guts. Besides, it wasn't as if the kid was so far off the beam.

When he swung onto the plateau she was ready and waiting, dressed up in starchy pink, hopping out to his car like a bunny.

"Oh, Steve! I'm so glad you stayed! Steve! I'm so glad you're here! I waited my breakfast, a special big breakfast; I'm terribly hungry; I hope you're right next door to starving —"

The door went wide, drawing him in. He stepped warily, not that he believed anything, but it didn't pay to be careless. Just the same, a jolt came to him. Not a jolt coming from anything Nella said, but the other kind. He'd been in plenty of swell places — night clubs and like that — but this house was different. The hall was painted yellow, pale yellow; the dining room, green and cream. Not colors that screamed money, but that had a kind of clean freshness. Flowers, some in fabric and some real. Chairs, little tables, bright silver. . . .

"You have to think my house is

lovely," Nella said, and there she went again, cheek to the creamy enamel of a door-frame, hugging it:

"It sure is, babe," he said carefully. "Swell." For a minute there, with her hugging the door-frame, he was seeing things — a sunshine that centered on her, alive and tender, flowing back and forth over her like breath.

"Now you've got me going," he protested, and shook himself. A good thing he did, too. He saw then that the room was just any room, that's all; in very nice shape, of course, but only a small dining room with a lot of bright sunshine coming in through the curtains to lie quietly on the table and the dishes and the silver. No more flowing back and forth. . . .

That's the way it went after breakfast, too. Everything was all right, almost. They drove in his car to the river that curved along the east side of the valley; they lay beside it, lazy in the shade. When some boys and girls came along he borrowed trunks and dove in with them, racing and tagging; kid stuff, but a chance for him to keep his eyes open. Nella, he could see, was treated different; not as if the kids were afraid of her, though — more as if they were respectful. They tagged her, but while they pushed each other under water they didn't push Nella. Nella did a dive; they all yelled it was wonderful. Another girl did a better one; they yelled it was awful. When they went home Nella looked after them, lonesome, but then she looked back at him and became cheerful and asked

him back up to the house for lunch.

That time there wasn't anything about the house at all. As for the way Nella spattered words — well, that was girl stuff, no dizzier than any dame. He decided she wasn't any more than simple-minded. Someone — her mother, maybe — had sold her a bill of goods about the house.

Then he forgot that, too. Once they'd finished eating, she dared him to race her to the bluff-top. Out in the sand and thin grass, and among the boulders between the trees, she could swing herself up like a monkey in rigging; at first, he kept abreast, but after a while he began to lag, blowing hard. At the very top was a huge rock with steep sides; she seemed to slide up, but he had to crawl, itching and hot, his shirt ripped and his hands skinned, while she laughed at his troubles from above.

"You devil," he told her, when he'd made it at last. "You'll pay for this!"

She laughed when he caught her, laughed in his arms, laughed against his hair, against his mouth. He pulled her down the rock and she lay laughing in the grass at its feet, provoking him with her constant laughter. . . .

They went down the bluff holding hands.

Crazy? That kid crazy? Crazy like a fox, that's all. She knew what she wanted. Wild, that's what she was. Too wild for the mud hunks in this town. But okay with him. He liked 'em wild.

"It's nice you love me; I'm glad

you love me; even last night I thought maybe you'd love me if you stayed." She kept stopping to rub her cheek on his sleeve.

"You're not hard to take, baby," he let her know, making his voice deep. "You're about the swellest kid I ever met." He could tell 'em when he wanted to. All the rest of that day he spent seeing to it she knew a good Joe when she had one. Lying beside her in the porch chair, eating dinner on the porch, too. Spinning more yarns about the world.

"You don't want I should go back to Nelson's, do you, honey?" he coaxed, when she turned sleepy and nuzzling. He might just as well cinch it now. "Why don't I just stay with you, up here?"

"Oh, no!" She said it so quick she stopped a yawn in the middle, sitting up tight, and he knew then what was coming. "You can't sleep here, Steve. My house wouldn't like it."

Right after he'd decided she was okay, too. No jolt, this time; it just made him sore. He stood up, flexing his muscles.

"Feel that bicep, kid. Think your house could do anything to that?"

"Carl had muscles, too. Carl was *very* strong. The house didn't like it when *he* stayed."

That stopped him cold, almost.

He asked, "Who's Carl?"

"Carl's a boy who used to love me."

"Why, you —" He stopped, speechless. Innocent! Innocent little punk! That's what he'd thought of her. And here she was standing up close to him,

on this porch of hers, handing him baby stares, talking about it as if it was nothing at all.

"It seems like forever since Carl went away."

So that was it. A past. "She ain't a widow, exactly." Something like that was the way she'd been put to him. All over town it must be, the way this Carl had been going with her, and then beat it, probably afraid he'd have to marry her. No wonder the kid was — well, not nuts exactly, but right next door to it.

Anyway, it was no skin off his nose.

"Aw, babe." He hugged her. "That's tough. That guy was a rat. You don't have to worry that I'll beat it. I'll see a judge any time you say."

"He wasn't a rat. He was nice. I liked him. I was sorry when he went. I got lonesome."

"Sure you did, you poor kid. You don't have to be lonesome no more, though. We'll get married tomorrow, if you want." Usually he let them bring up the wedding deal, let them be the anxious ones. This Carl business, though, was an opening.

She strained against his arms. "No, we mustn't get married. Not ever."

For the second time in one evening he didn't think he was hearing straight. "What do you mean, not get married?"

"I like you this way."

Bats, at that. More than one way, too.

He tried joking her out of it. "You mean you stay alone up here, and me at Nelson's, in that dump?"

"You can be here all day."

"Nights, I'm talking of."

"My house is much stronger, nights. You mustn't even go in my house, nights. That's why we're out here, on the porch."

"Babe, listen. Don't you love me?" He put all the trembles in that one.

"You're fun. I love fun. But not nights."

"You're a silly kid. Here, kiss papa." He pulled her up close again.

He slept, though, at Nelson's.

He slept every night at Nelson's. Exasperating. He couldn't get it. He pushed her away and walked in through her house once, at nine in the evening, full dark, and not a thing happened to him. She tagged along at his heels, crying, actually, pulling him back to the porch again, not believing even when he'd showed her how safe it was. He just couldn't get it, because in every other way no kitten was ever easier. She was affectionate and full of life, never getting enough swimming or hiking or climbing or any of that small-town stuff. Of course, it wasn't too bad a life for a change — all he could eat, and his belly was flattening, and Nella entirely gone on him.

But she wouldn't change.

One night, when he got back to Nelson's, late, Nelson was still hanging around at the lunch counter.

"Havin' a cup of coffee," Nelson said. "You want one?"

"Sure. Thanks." Wires tightened on his spine, though; he'd been expecting this. This was where a small

town tried sticking its nose in his business.

"I hear you been seein' a lot of your cousin." Nelson poured out the coffee.

"Every day," Steve answered him promptly. "Anything to you?"

"Oh, no, no." Nelson swallowed down half his own cupful. "Funny thing about Nella. Bad luck with her boy friends."

"That so?"

"Yeah." Nelson wasn't looking at him. "Young fella named Viney. Carl Viney. Father still farms here — three, four miles out. Carl went with Nella pretty steady for a while. Got kind of thick, I guess. Then one night he went away. Never been seen or heard of since."

"Well, the dirty skunk," Steve said.

"Don't get me wrong." Nelson was in a hurry now. "I ain't saying a word against Nella. Nice kid —" he let it drift into silence.

"You don't have to worry that I'll stand her up," Steve made it strong enough to be definite. "I'm arranging to marry her, right now."

"That's fine," Nelson said, luke-warm.

When Steve went upstairs, Nelson's eyes didn't lift to his back, but there was warning in Nelson, all right. After that, he always stopped when he came in, daring Nelson to start something, but Nelson never peeped again. Just the same, it made him want to hurry things.

"Say, Nelson was talking to me

about you last night," he told Nella, again from a porch chair. "He says you're an heiress."

"You mean, about my money? Isn't it nice I have money, Steve? If I didn't, I could never live up here —"

"I'll say you're lucky. You handle it all by yourself?"

"Oh, no. Mr. Chandler — that's Mr. Chandler who bought the bank — takes care of it. Invests it for me. There's about seventy thousand, now, Mr. Chandler says. He's very good about money; he puts it in farm mortgages, mostly. I never spend much of it — only my income." She was as open about this as about anything else he had asked.

He whistled. "Baby! You got any idea how *much* dough that is? Baby, how you could live in the big time!" He was galvanized, almost awe-stricken. Seventy gees! Better, much better, than he'd ever expected. Better, much better, than anything he'd ever come in for before. "Why're you sticking in this dead dump?"

"You know why, silly. I can't leave my house, can I?"

"You'll be leaving it soon, kid, just as soon as we're hitched. And we're not stalling, either. We —"

"But you *know* we're not getting married. Ever."

"I tell you what." He didn't dare look at her, because if he did, with this guff she forever threw back at him, and right now when he'd found out how big the stake was, too, he'd have to start slapping her down. Patience! If people wanted to find out

about patience, they ought to take lessons from him. "I tell you what — I'll give you my car for a present. Right now. It ain't what it once was — you can trade it in on a new one. Then we'll be all set for when we do get hitched, and in between we can take us some real trips around here."

She grabbed at it, anxious to be done with quarreling. "That's generous of you, Steve — I've never had a car. I don't know — after daddy and mother — but there's no reason —"

A trip to the bank for the money meant he could cinch a few things.

"This is Steve Karakas. Steve's giving me his old car. I want to trade it in on a new one if I can have the money." As always, Nella put out all she had all at once.

Mr. Chandler shook hands with Steve. A soft, moon-faced man, easy-going.

"I don't know why not, Nella," Mr. Chandler said. "You got money around you're the boss of."

Chandler, a guy he could handle with one hand, too. And the money was there.

They drove to Red Falls with the certified check, and came back with the brand-new car. He taught Nella to drive it; she drove, when she caught on, like a hummingbird flying. They went two hundred, three hundred miles in a day. But they were back, nearly always, at night. Right up to the day in October.

Steve was at the wheel, on that day, when they began a seventy-mile

drive to a movie. Beside him, Nella kept squeezing his arm; the minute he'd met her, on that day, he'd known she was lifted up. Her cheeks shone red-hot and her eyes were dark.

"What do you think, Steve?" She was always ready to babble. "I've been talking to Martha. Martha thinks I may be getting a baby."

"You're kidding." The words jolted out of him.

"Why, Steve, what's the matter? It'll be wonderful for me, when you're gone and I'm there in the house again. I won't be alone, really; not if I have a baby. I never had a baby, before. This will be the first time."

He stopped her.

"That cuts it. That cuts all this talk about your being alone in the house, too. You're marrying me, see? And from then on you do what I say."

The half-sick thrill, the one from halfway up the bluffside, was back in him, slapping this way and that like a gone-wild wave. One thing he hadn't tried, ever, was getting rid of a dame who was having a kid. People noticed things like that. It'd soon show on Nella, little and thin the way she was. They might trace him. He'd have to work quick now. Nor could he give it all up and go off by himself. Not this time — he needed that dough. Everything he had was sunk into this. Paying Nelson, giving her the car. He was flat.

"But Steve —"

"Look here, girl. You've got to get

hitched now. Don't you know that?" Imagine having to argue with a girl, the shape she was in.

"But I don't want to. We mustn't. You don't know what my house would —"

"You don't think your crazy talk makes any difference to me, do you?" He leaned toward her, letting her see what his face was with the friendliness off. He picked up her right hand. "Leave me know, when you've had enough," he said, and began twisting.

She looked at him, not believing — the way women did when you had to get tough the first time. Her eyes turned bluer and wider and wet, but she took it plenty; he thought for a while he'd have to break her arm. That wouldn't have been so good, either.

"Steve," she whispered, at last.

He stopped the twist right away, glad to. "So you got the idea."

"I guess I can just as well marry you." She didn't look bewildered any more. Or even frightened. Just white and quiet. He started the car quickly, before she could change her mind, heading for the county seat. She sat hunched up, not looking at him, not saying anything. But when they got to Red Falls she told him where the courthouse was, and went along like a lamb, giving all the right answers to the license clerk and the Justice of the Peace.

Then she sat quiet in the car, going back.

"Maybe it'll be better," was the only thing she said, once. "Maybe

it'll be better for the baby. I can tell the people in town. Or it might be in the papers."

"Sure, it'll be in the papers," he told her. "Cheer up, kid; they'll all know you're married, now."

But she wouldn't cheer up. As soon as they got to her house, he told Martha. Martha looked at him, her mouth, toothless as usual, working a little. Then she turned around without saying anything and went off to the kitchen. It was dark when they got home; entirely dark. He walked in the house the same way he had that one other time, bold as brass, and again nothing happened. What was there to happen? From a plain house, with lights on?

And Nella came after him, quiet. Not crying, this time, not pulling him back. He'd showed her.

"Your house, see —" he held both arms out — "it likes me."

She wouldn't answer, not even while they ate. The gloom got on his nerves. He'd showed her, all right, and she'd have to take it. But he still had to work on her. You'd think she knew what was coming to her, the way she was acting. But she couldn't. How could she? They never did.

"This ain't no funeral. Come on, sit by papa." When she stood up after dinner, he put his arm around her, walking her toward the living room. "The trouble with you is, you're fed up, same as me. It's this town. What you want is to get your dough out of that silly bank and go places where it'll mean something.

Get away from this town, from this house. I don't blame you, it gives you the willies."

The lights dimmed, then came back on steady.

"See," he told her. "A burg like this, even the lights are no good. Baby, you should see a big town. Lights to put your eyes out. You could go places in a big town, too, baby; you're young, you got looks. Say, babe, your life's not even started. What do you say we beat it out of here, huh?"

"Maybe," she said.

"That's the stuff!" This was the most she had ever given in. He'd get around her, all right. He pulled her with him to an armchair; she sat limp, unresisting, her head heavy on his shoulder.

"See, babe, this is what we'll do." For the rest of the evening he spun it out. Lights. Drinks. Real drinks. Shows. Night clubs. Big-town life. She took it in, quiet.

When he couldn't stand any more he stood up, stretching. "Well, baby, let's turn in. Your wedding night — it only comes but once."

She sprang up then, clutching his arm, her eyes big and terrified, right back to what she'd been.

"Steve, don't stay tonight. Even if we are married, go back down to Nelson's, like always. Don't stay here."

"Say, what is this?" he asked, incredulous. "Now, listen, baby. You wouldn't want I should have to get tough with you, not on your wedding —"

She dropped his arm, the terror and everything else going out of her face.

"All right," she said.

They went up, softly, the carpeted stairs. She slept alone up there, she said; Martha had a room off the kitchen. For the first time he went into her room — white and big, with blue on the bed and the floor, and a lot of thin curtains around it, like veils. When he stepped over the door-sill the lights dimmed once more, as they had downstairs, and for a minute a chill fog surrounded him; but then the lights came back up and it was all right — just a silly girl's room. In bed, Nella lay stiff in his arms.

"Aw, cut it, kid," he said. "Relax."

"I'm sorry, Steve."

"Sorry? What've you got to be sorry about?"

"I'll be lonesome when you're gone."

Oh, well, no reason he shouldn't kid her along.

"Can't you get it in your silly little head? I'm going away, sure. So are you."

"That's what Carl said, too."

"Carl said — Say, is that nice? Talking about another guy on our wedding night?"

"I was lying here looking at him in the moonlight, just like this, and he went. He didn't even take his clothes along."

A tiny prick of caution stirred in him.

"What?"

"He didn't even take his clothes."

"Say, what is this?" Muscles were

tightening now. "What're you getting at? What happened to his clothes?"

"We hid them, and then, when he never came back, Martha burned them. In the furnace."

He hadn't been afraid when he walked in from the porch; he hadn't been afraid at their late dinner, or in the living room, or coming upstairs. But now a great surge of something washed over him — all the uneasiness he had ever felt with her collected to stormy power. She lay in his arm, small, pale, and still, looking helplessly at him from wide eyes; there was no fear in her face, only expectation—an expectation that reached out to him.

His muscles gathered, his arm squirmed from under her, his hands got her throat.

"What happened to that guy? If you think you're pulling anything on me, it don't go, see? I'm a big-town guy; by heaven, if I thought you —"

A grayness was gathering around him; that fog, again; his mind and his hands leaped to new strength, he clamped with grimmer purpose on her throat. But her voice went on, even and sorrowful.

"I'll forget about today, Steve; I'll forget my arm. I'll tell the baby you

were nice, Steve; I'm sorry about the house, Steve; it's just that it loves me and it's jealous and it won't let anything bad happen to me. It was the house that took Carl away. I know it; I felt it. I was here, just like this, and he — Steve! Steve!"

She cried out, a thin cry breaking against the night, because he was no longer there. The hands on her throat were gone; the shoulder she had clutched was gone. In the pillow were the wrinkles where his head had been, but his head wasn't there. She put out her hand; the warmth of his body was still in the bed — but he was gone. She rose on one elbow to look over the side of the bed to where he had thrown his clothes on the floor.

They were there.

She lay back, then, eyes wide, face not rebellious, only wistful and curious — as if she wondered not why but with what invisible hands her house had, for a second time, taken a lover from her. . . .

There was nothing in the room to answer. Moonlight lay along the ceiling as reassuring as a smile, and a white window curtain, blowing over the bed, touched her shoulder like a caress.



SHOEMAKER'S LAST

by PETER GODFREY

SETTLED COMFORTABLY IN THE BACK seat, every inch the retired country lawyer, Rolf le Roux arrived in the police car with Johnson and Botha a few minutes ahead of the mortuary van.

Dr. MacGregor had completed his examination and left, but Inspector Dirk Joubert of the Cape Town C.I.D. was standing near the body.

"Better put your pipe out, Uncle," he said to Rolf. "It is dangerous to smoke here in the bushes."

"If his beard hasn't caught alight yet," grinned Botha, "then the forest's safe."

Rolf did not even make a tentative gesture to remove his glowing cherry-wood kromsteel from his mouth. He stood looking at the body lying on its back in a hollow with the feet, raised on a boulder, pointing grotesquely to the road.

Joubert gave the medical details briefly. Death had been due to a blow by the traditional blunt instrument, and the murder had been committed elsewhere. "He was brought here in a car," he said, "and flung into the bushes. You can see the patch of oil on the road where the car stopped. I don't suppose anyone witnessed the disposal of the body — this is a lonely part of Oranjezicht."

"Do you know who he is, Dirk?" asked Johnson, looking at the body.

"Yes. Funny thing that. He was found this morning by one of those vagabonds who live in crude shacks here in the forest — Bergies, they call them. This particular Bergie knew him. The victim's name was James Lawson, and he was an orthopedic shoemaker here in town."

"It is strange this Bergie should have known him," said Rolf, "but not as strange as the fact that the shoemaker should be wearing only one shoe."

Botha bent forward to examine the shoe on the left foot. "This one appears to be handmade," he commented, "and seems to be a particularly close fit. I doubt whether the other shoe could have fallen off. It seems to me the only way it could have got lost was for someone to have removed it."

"But who would want to steal only one shoe?" asked Rolf.

"It must have been a one-legged man," said the ever-facetious Johnson, and Joubert laughed.

"Here is an even stranger coincidence," he said. "Klawitter Fransman, the Bergie who found and identified the body, walks with a crutch. His left leg has been amputated near the hip."

Rolf slumped in an easy chair in Joubert's office while statements were

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being taken. Near him sat the Sergeant, with a lizard-like lack of curiosity on his features, busily making shorthand hieroglyphics on paper.

Joubert was militarily efficient behind his desk.

The Bergie, Klawitter, sat uneasily on the edge of his chair, gripping his crudely-hewn crutch with both hands. Yes, he knew Lawson. Lawson made his shoes. A good Baas, Lawson. Never wanted money.

Why? "A long story, Baasie. The day the shark got my leg, Baas Lawson pulled me out of the water. Since then he has always given me shoes."

"Do you know why it is that Lawson was in Oranjezicht that night?" asked Joubert.

No, he did not know why Lawson was in Oranjezicht that night. Lawson never came to see him. He always went to Lawson's shop when he wanted a new shoe.

"Where were you the night before last?"

"I was sleeping, Baasie."

Joubert asked suddenly: "Klawitter, why did you kill Mr. Lawson?"

"Ekke? Oh, no, Baasie, no!"

Joubert pressed a buzzer on his desk. "Lock him up," he said to the constable who entered. Dazed and bewildered, the one-legged Bergie left for the cells.

"I thought you said Lawson was killed in another place?" asked Rolf.

"Yes. MacGregor reckons a wound like that would have spurted quite a lot of blood. There was very little on the bushes — in fact, only where the

head rested. We deduce the body was brought there in a car — from the oily spot on the road."

"What time was the body actually discovered?" asked Rolf.

"At a quarter to eight on Monday morning."

"And when did death occur?"

"Some time on Saturday night. MacGregor thinks between 10 P.M. on Saturday and 4 A.M. on Sunday."

"It seems to me," said Rolf, "you are being a little unfair to this Bergie. It is true he has only one leg, and a shoe is missing. But I doubt whether he has a motorcar or the strength to throw a body into the bushes."

"Perhaps it is a bit unfair," said Joubert, "but what else can I do? If I let him go now, I will never see him again, and his evidence is essential."

"Did you find any valuables on the body?" asked Rolf. "Or does it seem as though Lawson was robbed?"

"The pockets were comparatively empty, but I don't think anything was taken. There was a wallet with a couple of pound notes in the breast pocket of the jacket, and he had quite a good watch on his wrist."

There was a knock on the door and the constable ushered in a sharp-featured, thin-lipped gangling man whom Joubert motioned to a chair.

"You are Mr. Naude?" he asked, and on his visitor's affirmative nod, proceeded with his questions. "I understand you were with James Lawson on Saturday night. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Where did you go and what did you do?"

"I live at Fresnaye. At about eight o'clock on Saturday night, by arrangement, I drove to Lawson's flat in the Gardens, picked him up there, and went on to play squash in Tamboers Kloof."

"Is there a squash court in Tamboers Kloof?" asked Joubert.

"Not a public court, Inspector. A friend of ours, McIlveny, who is at the moment away overseas, converted a small building into a squash court and gave me the key so we could use the court when we liked."

"So you played squash. What time did you leave?"

"About 10:45."

"Did you take Lawson back to his flat?"

"No. He asked me to drop him at the corner of De Waal Park. He said he wanted to visit a friend."

"Did he mention which friend?"

"No. But I had the impression he meant Conyers, who is the only person we both know staying in that neighborhood."

Joubert changed his tactics abruptly. "What was the cause of your quarrel with Lawson?" he asked sharply.

"There was no quarrel," said Naude angrily. "He was my best friend. What are you trying to insinuate?"

Joubert ignored the outburst. "You realize, of course," he said, "you were probably the last person to see

Lawson alive. You must appreciate you are under grave suspicion."

"How do you know I was the last person to see him alive?" asked Naude. "Why don't you ask Conyers? I am pretty certain it was he whom Lawson was going to see, and if it was, I can imagine a motive for murder."

"And what would that be?" asked Joubert suavely.

"Well, I saw Conyers going out of Lawson's shop last Thursday, and the following afternoon Lawson told me £20 had been stolen out of the drawer in his work-bench. I have a shrewd suspicion who stole that money, and I think Lawson had a very similar idea."

"What time did you get home after dropping Lawson?"

"About ten past eleven."

"Did anyone see you arrive?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. I did answer a phone call from my brother-in-law just after midnight. Otherwise I have no evidence except my own word."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Naude," said Joubert. "I have your address, and we will call on you to sign your statement as soon as it is typed."

Rolf interposed before Naude could reach the door. "I will not keep you long," he said apologetically, "but there are one or two facts I would like to have made clear. This game of squash now, would it be played in ordinary shoes?"

"No, both Lawson and I wore tennis shoes."

"And did Lawson leave his tennis shoes at the squash court?"

"No. He had them in his hand when he got out of the car."

"Is this game played with a bat of some sort?" Rolf asked.

"With a racquet — like a small tennis racquet."

"So when Lawson left you, he was carrying his racquet as well as his tennis shoes?"

"No. His racquet was broken a couple of weeks ago, and he was using a spare one of mine."

Rolf nodded his thanks, and Naude left. A huge puff of smoke filtered out through Rolf's whiskers. "So now the mystery of the missing shoe has become the mystery of the *three* missing shoes," he said. "But perhaps this Mr. Conyers can tell us more about that. You have his address?"

"Yes," answered Joubert. "He is on my list as one of Lawson's friends. I think it would not be a bad idea if we went now to interview Mr. Conyers."

They went down the stairs and entered Joubert's two-seater. Rolf and Joubert occupied the front seat; the Sergeant sat bolt-upright in the mathematical center of the dickey.

They found Conyers snoring heavily, face downwards on a bed in his room just off Orange Street. A heavy odor of brandy hung over the sleeping figure.

Joubert shook Conyers into stupid wakefulness, and explained the purpose of the visit. Conyers mumbled replies to questions.

Suddenly he rose to his feet, weaved across the floor to the wash basin and stood over it for a moment, his shoulders heaving. When he returned to the bed he was still unsteady and pale, but his voice was sober.

Joubert said, "Did you kill Lawson because he knew about the £20 you stole from him?"

Conyers sat on the bed and put his head in his hands. "Look here, Inspector," he said, "I didn't kill Lawson. I didn't steal any money from him. He was a friend of mine."

"Did you meet him on Saturday night?"

"I don't know. I don't remember. I went to the pub in the afternoon . . . Look here, I'm not going to say any more. I want to see my lawyer."

"You will see him at Caledon Square then," said Joubert, and the Sergeant led the unresisting man out.

Back at the office, Joubert and Rolf sat down with Johnson and Botha to collate material.

Rolf listened to the arguments of the others for some time, and then leaned forward in his chair.

"There is only one problem in this case," he said. "Why should a single shoe be stolen? I can answer that question. I know who your murderer is, but I doubt if we have sufficient proof in the legal sense."

He explained his deductions in detail. When he had finished, Joubert said: "If we send Johnson and Botha there now —"

"They will find nothing," interrupted Rolf. "Don't forget how much

time he's had to clean up the evidence. No, Dirk, I have a better plan. . . ."

Rolf le Roux took the chair offered him, and sat with the little square suitcase on his lap. He fiddled uncomfortably with the lid.

He started: "I know you killed Lawson," and then added hastily, "but I have no proof, and proof will probably never be found. I am telling you this because we are alone together. What you tell me has got no legal value as evidence. I am here because I am very curious to find out if my reasoning is correct."

Naude laughed uneasily. "I am not guilty," he said, "so your reasoning must be wrong. But you have made me curious too. What is your theory?"

"Let us start with the shoe," said Rolf. "Lawson was found murdered with a handmade shoe on his left foot, and the shoe from the right foot missing. They were tight-fitting, those shoes, and could not have fallen off. Therefore, the shoe that is missing must have been removed by someone.

"To me that was the largest problem. There were three suspects in the case, and of each of them I asked myself, 'Could he have a motive for removing one shoe?'"

"The first suspect was a Bergie who lived near the spot where the body was found — a Bergie with only one leg. Do you know whom I mean?"

"Yes," answered Naude. "Klawitter. I know him well. I was in the

boat with Lawson when we pulled him out after the shark had got him."

"Well," continued Rolf, "Klawitter may have had a motive for stealing one shoe but he had no motive for murder. Lawson, you must remember, was the man who was giving him a shoe whenever he needed it, free of charge. Why then should he kill him?"

"There remains the possibility that Klawitter came across the dead body of his benefactor in the bushes, realized there would be no more free gifts, and stole the shoe off the dead man's foot. But that explanation, plausible as it appears, does not cover other factors in the situation.

"If he stole the shoe, then one may say of him, 'Here is a Bergie with a dishonest pattern in his mind.' But if he has this dishonest pattern in his mind, would he steal only the shoe? No, he would at least run through the pockets of the corpse for valuables, and he did not do so. Moreover, if he had removed even one shoe from the corpse, it is not likely that he would report his discovery to the police. . . .

"No, Klawitter was not responsible either for the murder or the removal of the shoe.

"Conyers, who was drunk over the whole weekend and remembers nothing — could he have done it? A drunken man, you may say, might remove one shoe just because of his drunkenness, but you would be wrong. Drink does not obscure motives — on the contrary, it accen-

tuates them. The removal of the shoe was a subtle action with a subtle motive — not the coarse fumbling of a drunkard. So I must dismiss Conyers as a suspect too.

"There remains yourself, and when I considered your story, the incidents of the night in question fell into their proper places.

"Obviously, the man who removed that shoe did so because he felt that in some way or the other it provided a clue to the murderer. Why then did he not remove both shoes? Logically, the reason can only be that if the corpse was found without shoes, somehow that very fact also pointed the finger at him.

"And then I asked myself, 'Why should the right shoe be taken, and not the left shoe?' Again, there can only be one answer to that question — the right shoe was not the same as the left shoe. In other words, Lawson must have been wearing two different shoes!

"When does a man, normally and rationally, have odd shoes on his feet? I will tell you. *It is when he is halfway through changing from one pair of shoes to another!* On the evidence before me, there is only one place where Lawson changed from one pair of shoes to another pair of shoes — and that was on the squash court. If that is where Lawson was murdered, then there is only one man, by his own testimony, who could be guilty."

Naude sat tight-lipped, but his words came lightly enough. "Very ingenious," he said, "but as you men-

tioned before, no legal proof whatsoever. Go on. Tell me what you think happened at the squash court."

"This crime was not premeditated," said Rolf. "It was a crime of passion. I think the two of you played squash, and later, while Lawson was changing his shoes, he told you something which caused you to lose your temper. You snatched up a weapon and battered his skull."

"What could Lawson have told me that would make me lose control like that?" asked Naude sarcastically.

"Here I can only guess," said Rolf. "It is a human failing often to ascribe to others your own bad character. Therefore, I think it was not Conyers, but you, who stole that £20 from Lawson, and when Lawson accused you, you completely lost your head."

Rolf re-lit the pipe he had allowed to go out while he was talking. "My theory," he said, "is that you put Lawson's body in your car, drove to Oranjezicht, and threw the body in the bushes. You chose that spot because you knew it was near where Klawitter had his 'pondokkie' and you had some vague idea of casting suspicion on him. Lawson's body fell with the head in a hollow and the legs raised on a rock. Then you had a terrible shock. You saw for the first time he had not finished changing his shoes — he had on one regular shoe and one tennis shoe.

"Your instinct was to panic, but you controlled yourself. You thought out all the contingencies. You realized if you could persuade the police that

Lawson was alive when you left him and you removed all evidence to the contrary, then you were safe.

"You did not want to go back to the squash court immediately, because you were anxious to establish an alibi for yourself, but you could not leave the corpse there with the tennis shoe pointing at your guilt. So you removed the white shoe, and then you must have hesitated, wondering whether to remove the brown shoe too.

"You rejected that idea because a corpse with no shoes would make the police wonder what kind of shoes he could have been wearing. And that would not have suited you either. You did not even want the idea to enter their heads that he might have been wearing tennis shoes. . . .

"At the same time, it may have occurred to you as an added incentive that leaving one shoe on would be another method of pointing a finger at Klawitter, a man with only one leg.

"You then went home to answer the telephone call you knew was coming from your brother-in-law, to establish your alibi. Later you returned to the squash court where you destroyed all evidence."

Naude asked: "Have you discussed this theory with anyone else?"

"No. With whom should I discuss it? The police are not interested in theories—particularly when there is no evidence to back them."

"Perhaps not, but if they heard your theory they might take it into

their heads to look even harder for evidence—and who knows what might result?" He stood up, and his casual movement did not entirely conceal his bodily tension. "You want to know whether you are right? You are—in every detail. And I am not going to take the risk of allowing you to leave here with that knowledge."

His fingers closed over a large paperweight on the desk.

"What do you mean?" asked Rolf, and flung himself sideways off the chair as Naude sprang at him. A thrust of his leg, and Naude too had fallen on the ground. Joubert, Johnson, and the Sergeant burst through the door and grabbed him.

Rolf climbed unsteadily to his feet, and trampled out the ashes of his pipe, which were glowing fiercely on the carpet.

"This trial," said Joubert, "is going to make legal history." He picked up the little suitcase Rolf had carried, and looked at it almost affectionately. "It is the first time a walkie-talkie transmitter has been used to relay a confession from a criminal without his knowledge. You deserve a medal for this, Uncle Rolf."

"A medal?" queried Rolf shakily, and then added: "No, Dirk, I would not do it again for all the medals in the world. I do not like violence.

"No, I do not like violence," he repeated, "and this Naude is a violent man. He would have smashed my head. As it is," he added with a twinkle, "he almost smashed my pipe."

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MRS. BRIERLEY SUPPLIES THE EVIDENCE

by RICHARD HULL

DETECTIVE-SERGEANT. ANDREWS looked at the faded, gray-haired woman before him. "Mrs. Brierley?" he said. "You have taken the lease of 32 Gadsdown Road, have you not, and let off parts of it?"

"Yes. But just this weekend I am taking a rest and staying with my sister. Have I got to be reminded of Gadsdown Road and all its quarrels?"

"I am afraid it's the quarrels that I want to know about."

"Oh? Have those two been brawling again?"

"Rather more than that, I am afraid, Mrs. Brierley. The matter may be —" He hesitated a moment. "It might even be murder."

Mrs. Brierley smoothed her skirt. "I wouldn't put it past either of them."

"Either of them?" Haven't you got three lodgers in the house?"

"Yes. But Downton hardly counts. I had Mortimer and Whitman in mind."

"I see. Would you care to make a statement, Mrs. Brierley? It might be used in evidence."

"Against Mortimer or Whitman?"
"Against anyone."

Mrs. Brierley shrugged her shoulders and accepted the opening sentences that Andrews suggested to her, though not without some attempt at variation. She seemed to be anxious to impress the sergeant with the fact that she had not always had to let rooms and that when she had, it had originally been in a more fashionable neighborhood than Gadsdown Road. But eventually Andrews brought her back to the point.

"And now," she went on, "I have three lodgers. Mortimer, a big, red-headed, violent man, always deter-

mined to be cock of the walk. He must have all the windows open, my lord must, and the radio mustn't be played in the house and if he says a door is to be open, open it has to be. Whitman's just the opposite — a small cock-sparrow with black hair and a vindictive temper. He doesn't say much at the time but he broods and gets his own back. He likes the windows shut and the radio on. I've had to make rules about when it can and when it can't be played."

"And Downton?"

"Oh, no one takes any notice of him. Quiet, fair-haired little mouse of a man. Not but what he doesn't get his fun out of the other two. Sometimes I think he goads them on to watch them fight. He's a smug type, is Downton. He'd be more human with more vices. He doesn't even smoke."

"I see. They can all use the kitchenette halfway up the stairs, can't they? You've had some trouble there?"

"Naturally. There would be with anything they share. And then the gas has been giving trouble. There's a pilot jet for the water-heater and if the window is open it blows out. I tried putting something up to keep the draft off, but it hasn't worked. I've had to say it must be kept shut."

"You boarded it up, didn't you?"

"I had to."

"No doubt. And you blocked up the chinks of the window?"

"I had to keep the air out. Whatever Mortimer might say."

"It's had unfortunate results. When

one of your lodgers was in there, the jet went out and the gas leaked. It's a very small room, Mrs. Brierley, and it was practically sealed up. Window and door."

"The smell of gas escaped into the house otherwise. And then I had all of them complaining."

"Quite. But if anyone got caught in there with the gas leaking —"

"He would walk out again."

"There were fingerprints on the door as if he had tried to, but it seems to have stuck. The key —"

"There was no key."

"Why was that?"

"Whitman played a practical joke one day and locked Mortimer in — by accident, he said — so I took it away. But not until after Mortimer had broken the window. Did he break it this time?"

"The window could not be broken. Mrs. Brierley, I told you this might be murder."

"I'm not so stupid as not to see what has happened. I suppose that the smell of gas became obvious and that either Mortimer or Whitman is dead and you think the other killed him. Well, I shouldn't be surprised but I don't know why you think it was murder. Why do you?"

"I have already told you that the door did not stick in a natural way. For the rest, Mrs. Brierley, you are jumping to conclusions and not necessarily to right ones. Bear that in mind most carefully, please." Andrews looked at her pointedly and then went on. "Have you any reason for

saying you would not be surprised if either Mortimer or Whitman committed murder? It's a very extreme statement."

"They were extreme men. Mortimer, when he was crossed, would get into a towering passion and then he would hardly know what he was doing. And as for Whitman, I've seen him looking at Mortimer when he thought no one was about. If ever a man could hate —"

"That proves nothing."

"Well someone did it, it seems — even if you haven't yet told me which of them died. And that jet wouldn't blow out naturally — not after all the precautions I've taken."

Andrews put his head on one side. "It was a small kitchenette. I should have thought they would have left the door open."

"They all shut it."

"Even Mortimer with his love of fresh air?"

"He wanted to keep the others out. He's even locked it on the inside."

"But I thought the key —?"

"That's why I took it away."

"I see. So they all shut the door. And kept it shut. Very well. To go back to last night, I have had explanations of their movements from two of them. Did they tell you anything of what they were doing? I suppose you told them you were going away for the weekend?"

"Yes. Though I don't have to ask their leave and they can get on without me. When did this happen?"

"About six, probably."

"They'd be getting their supper ready. Mortimer usually had his first — quarter to six was his time in the kitchen — and then went out to the pub down the street. You can ask them if he came. Whitman used to stay away till he thought Mortimer had gone. Then he'd come back."

"And Downton?"

"Slipped in between the two. He generally told Mortimer to hurry or Whitman would be back and then apologized to Whitman for being late which he made out to be Mortimer's fault. I've heard him — always causing bad blood with both of them."

"I see. Mortimer, five forty-five; Downton, soon after six; and Whitman, about half-past."

"Or later. But that's the order generally and it's about right."

"In that case only Downton could have killed Mortimer and only Whitman could have killed Downton?"

"Mortimer could have slipped back. He could have arranged things first."

"What things?"

"Well, for the door to stick."

"I see. You could usually hear them moving about?"

"If I was moving about the house, I might come across them. Of course, so long as they kept quiet, I —"

"Precisely. You let them go their own way. But on this occasion they knew you were out of the house?"

Mrs. Brierley nodded. "They did. At least, Mortimer did. I think I told the others, too."

"You are very insistent on Mortimer, Mrs. Brierley."

"He's the most likely."

"Supposing it was he who was dead?"

The faded gray eyes opened wide and then seemed to close. "I don't think he is, somehow. He's too — how shall I put it? — he's generally a great deal too much alive."

"As a matter of fact, Mrs. Brierley, he is not dead and he did go to his usual pub. It doesn't open till half-past six."

"Then he slipped back and found Whitman cooking. I don't know how he did the rest."

"Whitman could have found Downton there. Or the other way round. Or anyone could have slipped in."

"Not if they had no key of the front door. Only those three had them. And me. And I was here."

"It's not very far away."

"It's far enough. And my sister was with me most of the time. You can ask her."

"Thank you. But as she is out at the moment I should like to ask you something else instead. I want to go back to that key. Any of them would recognize it?"

"Probably. It was large and none of the other keys in the house are."

"And all your three lodgers could get at it?"

"It was in the pen-tray on my bureau, but I don't know if they knew where it was. And of course they wouldn't come into my room

without asking me. Only last night they knew I was out."

"I see. Mrs. Brierley, are you sure that if the door was shut the smell of gas would be very pronounced in the rest of the house?"

"Certainly. There were complaints about it."

"With the door shut?"

"I told you they always shut it."

"It opened quite easily, didn't it?"

"So far as I know. What are you getting at? Are you suggesting that it was locked?"

"Yes. From the outside. There was a little gadget arranged — a little flap that fell and blew out the jet. It worked automatically when the door was shut. The window was boarded up. And if the door —"

Before Andrews could go on, Mrs. Brierley interrupted him. "Blew it out when the door was shut? Then when Mortimer went in —"

"Mortimer came out again. He enjoyed his beer as usual."

"Then he fixed it up and left it for Whitman."

"I thought Downton came next?"

Mrs. Brierley looked a little puzzled. "So it would be," she said. "He must have forgotten that. Mortimer wouldn't want to kill Downton. Besides, I thought you said it was Whitman who —"

"No, Mrs. Brierley, I never said anything of the sort. It's Downton who is dead."

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Brierley looked staggered. "He got the wrong man?"

"Was it Mortimer at all, Mrs.

Brierley? I don't think that it was. Someone else, I fancy, had reasons for slipping up to that kitchen door, arranging the gadget, and taking away the matches. Someone who knew that Downton didn't smoke. Someone whose sister was with her most — but only most — of the time. It would be easy for whoever had fixed things up to get out of the way until Downton was in the kitchenette and then come up and turn the key in the lock and wait for a few minutes until the struggles inside got less. Then the key would go back, not to its usual place, but to a more obvious position. And whoever did it could slip out as fast as they had come, sublimely ignorant of even who it was who had died."

"You are absurd, Sergeant. Apart from anything else, I had no reason to have a harsh feeling of any sort toward Downton."

"Rather the reverse. He seems to have been rather good to you. I gather that he perhaps unwisely lent you money. I also gather that with him out of the way you knew how to get the receipts back."

"How dare you say such a thing! You have no reason even to suspect."

"I find no difficulty in doing that. You have not been wholly truthful."

"I have. That key *was* on top of the bureau."

"It may have been. I was not thinking of that. I was thinking of the door — the door that was air-proof. In fact, so air-proof that it was not long before a man inside was suffocated. *Yet it was supposed to have allowed the smell to escape into the house!*"

There was a pause. "You agree, don't you?" Andrews insisted.

There was no reply. Mrs. Brierley had no more evidence to give.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Robert Passano's "Punchinello, Funny Fellow" is one of the seven "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest. The author is a modern jack-of-all-trades, of the itinerant variety. He quit school at the age of seventeen when a police captain got him a job on a Baltimore & Ohio surveying junket, and he stayed with the assignment until its conclusion in East Saint Louis. Then he moved around the country, until a draft notice caught up with him in Pittsburgh. After army service Mr. Passano finished high school by correspondence, and went on to study civil engineering for three years, shuttling between Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland. For the past five years he has tried his hand at writing, earning his living meanwhile by being a dishwasher, car polisher, bartender, repair man, furniture upholsterer, freight handler, and architect's assistant.

Robert Passano's "Punchinello, Funny Fellow" is a tough, real, utterly convincing story — the kind, we regret to admit, that comes along much too infrequently. It is the kind of story, too, which gives no feeling whatever of contrivance, which is not even remotely clever or ingenious, which contains no artificial devices, no manufactured gimmicks, no sense of pat, articulated plot-construction. Yet the story, with nothing remarkable or even fresh in its plot, has something about it that you won't forget easily — a memorable quality and a deep feeling of integrity. And while the style reveals many of the characteristics of a beginner in the field, the writing also has something about it that you won't forget easily — an impressive quality that made your Editors certain, at the time we purchased this "first story," that Robert Passano is a new writer worth watching, that we would be hearing more from him in the near future — as we did.

PUNCHINELLO, FUNNY FELLOW

by ROBERT PASSANO

BY MIDNIGHT WEST LEXINGTON Street was almost quiet. The darkened store-fronts gazed at each other with imperturbable glass-and-

metal faces. Uniformed attendants of the two big movie houses made their last hurried preparations to loose their patrons into the night. A

dozen multi-colored cabs were lined up at the curb, a police car at the corner. The movie-goers rushed out, singly and in twos and threes, then slowed into a drifting mass.

Roy stood under the marquee, working a toothpick from one side of his mouth to the other, looking up and down the line of cabs at the curb. The toothpick snapped between his fingers and he walked toward the corner. He was almost on top of the police car before he saw it. Stopping abruptly, he hesitated, then smiled, took a cigarette from his pocket, and walked to the side of the car.

"Got a match, Officer?"

The policeman turned his head slowly and looked up at Roy. He fumbled through the pockets of his uniform and handed a folder of matches to the smiling young man standing outside.

"Thanks."

"Yeah."

Roy stepped out into the street in front of the police car and hailed a cruising cab, getting into the front seat next to the driver.

"Greenmount and Thirty-third."

He sat quietly for a while, listening to the rhythmic ticking of the meter. The driver glanced at the slouching figure next to him.

"Too bad the game was rained out tonight."

"Sure was."

"May be a good thing though. They would probably have lost. Take that second baseman, for instance . . ."

Roy wasn't listening. He watched the street signs, the thinning traffic. The clenched fist deep in his raincoat pocket opened, his fingers found the razor slash at the seam, slipped through, and clenched again around the butt of a revolver in his hip pocket.

" . . . then with two out in the last of the ninth . . ."

"Stop here."

"I thought you said Greenmount and Thirty-third. . . . Hey!"

"You heard me. Pull over to the curb and stop."

Roy held the gun in his lap, pointing it at the cabbie's face. The cab rolled to the curb and stopped. The driver just sat staring at the gun, his hands gripped on the wheel.

"Okay, let's have it. The change, too."

"Yeah, sure."

Roy took the bills and change with his left hand and stuffed them into his pocket.

"Get out and walk up the street. Don't turn around and don't yell."

The cabbie got quickly out of the car and walked stiffly away. Roy slid behind the wheel and shifted into first. The rear-view mirror caught the wide-eyed face of the cab driver and then the image was gone. Roy reached over and pulled the flag on the meter. The ticking stopped.

"This ride's on the house, Roy."

He drove for about six blocks, pulled the cab into an alley, and got out. He caught a street car back to his rooming house. . . .

The money was arranged in neat piles on top of the dresser. Four fives, two twos, and twelve ones. He counted the change a second time, three dollars and sixty-one cents. Thirty-nine dollars and sixty-one cents — not bad! Roy put the money into the bureau drawer under his handkerchiefs and placed his gun next to it. The magazine he had been reading that afternoon was lying on the floor. He picked it up and read for an hour before he went to sleep.

"How do I know what the guy looked like? With a gun sticking in my face I'm supposed to be taking pictures of him? He was just another guy. He gets into my cab on Lexington Street and says he wants to go to Greenmount and Thirty-third. Around Twenty-sixth Street he says, 'Stop here!' Just like that, calm-like he says, 'Stop here.' So I turn to tell him we ain't to Greenmount yet, and I see the gun. So what could I do, huh? He wants my money, so I give it to him. Then he says, 'Get out of the cab and walk up the street and don't make no noise.' And I do like he says. Then he gunned by in my cab. What about my cab, huh?"

"It'll turn up. Can't you tell us anything about him — tall, short, dark, light?"

"It's like I told you, he was just an average-looking guy. What about my cab?"

The pounding on the door woke him up.

"Mr. Brewster! Mr. Brewster! I gotta get in there to clean up. It's twelve thirty, Mr. Brewster. I gotta get your room done."

"All right, all right. Fifteen minutes."

Roy rolled over and put his feet on the cold floor. The taste of last night's cigarettes was still in his mouth. He got up, turned on the hot plate, pushed the coffee pot over the burner, and started to get dressed. He took a handful of bills out of the drawer and put them in his pocket; then picking up the gun, he gazed at it thoughtfully for a moment, twirled the cylinder, and put it back in the drawer. He drank half the coffee, made a face, and set the cup down. The cleaning woman was waiting in the hall.

"Sorry. I had to wake you up, Mr. Brewster, but I got my work to do. My, don't you look nice today."

He smiled at the fat old woman, reached into his pocket and pulled out a dollar.

"Put it on a good number, Mom."

She wiped her hands on her apron, reached out and took the crumpled bill.

The sun was bright and the air was clean. He whistled as he walked along, glancing out of the corner of his eye at his reflection in the store windows, until he came to Al's grill. The man leaning on the counter looked up for a moment, then back to his paper.

"What do you say, Al? How about a couple eggs?"

Al gave the order to the cook,

folded his paper, picked up a rag from behind the counter, and indifferently wiped the smooth surface in front of him.

"Finished with the paper, Al?"

He handed it to Roy.

"Don't walk out with it."

Roy glanced at the headlines, read the baseball scores, and finally reached the back page. It was in a small block near the bottom.

CAB DRIVER ROBBED

ARREST EXPECTED IN RECENT
WAVE OF HOLDUPS

A cab driven by Samuel Horton, of 207 West Reade Street, was held up and robbed early this morning. The bandit, described as a clean-cut young man between twenty-five and thirty years of age, escaped with forty-three dollars of Horton's money. The driver told police that his cab was hailed at Lexington Street and . . .

He turned back to the sports page. "Anything good running today, Al?"

Al shrugged his shoulders and kept on wiping the counter.

"Anybody in the bar?"

"Just the carpenters."

"Carpenters?"

"Building a bandstand. I'm getting a band and a floor show. Starts tonight."

Roy walked through the archway into the bar. It was almost as if he had

never been there before. In the bright daylight the imitation leather showed all its worn spots, the chrome trimming all its scratches, the baseboard the scuff marks of countless feet. The softness given by low lights at night was gone. The place reminded him of the fat old woman who cleaned his room. He looked toward the sound of the hammers. The bandstand was a skimpy-looking platform, made of second hand wood.

Roy laughed and walked back into the grill. He drank another cup of coffee and read the want ads. "Young man with driver's license." He wrote down the address on a match-folder cover and handed the paper back to Al. Al folded the paper and put it behind the counter.

The bus lurched and he nearly slid out of his seat.

"Excuse me."

"Huh?"

The woman walked over his feet before he could stand up. He moved over next to the window. A Cadillac passed the bus and went through the red light, unmindful of the policeman's whistle. The sound of the whistle chased the car but the policeman continued directing traffic. Roy watched the Cadillac until it was lost in the line ahead. He could see himself behind its wheel now, the top down, going through a red light, and stopping for the policeman's whistle, the big red-faced cop running up to the side of the car and pulling out his ticket book.

"Where do you think you're . . .
Oh, Mr. Brewster, I didn't recognize
you. New car?"

"No, I've had it a few weeks. Sorry
I didn't see the light, Joe. I was in a
hurry."

"That's all right, Mr. Brewster.
Sorry to have stopped you."

"Forget it."

Wonder what she'll do out on the
road? Ninety? One hundred? The
girl smiled at him as he got out of the
car, handing the attendant the
key. . . .

"Charles Street!"

He got off the bus, pausing for a
moment on the sidewalk to check
the address he had written on the
match folder. He crumpled it in his
hand and threw it in the gutter. Roy
walked along with the crowd, but
became annoyed with its slow pace.
He moved to the curb, stepping
down to pass those in front of him.
He saw a drugstore on the other side
of the street and decided he was
hungry. He bought a milk shake,
picked a magazine from the rack, and
found an empty booth. Starting from
the back, he paged through the
magazine, reading the jokes.

"Hello, Roy."

He looked up into Gloria's face.

"What happened to you last night?
I waited for you until Al's closed."

"I'm sorry, I forgot."

"Forgot! Who helps you do your
forgetting?"

"Don't talk like that, Gloria."

"Why shouldn't I? You stood me
up, didn't you?"

"I said I forgot. I'm sorry."

He turned the page and pretended
to read. He glanced up. She was star-
ing at him.

"You know, big shot, you're not the
only guy in the world. Jerry wanted
me to leave with him last night."

"That two-bit bookie."

"Yeah! You only wish you had
twenty-three cents to be as good."

She laughed. Her lipstick was
smeared. She probably had on those
white shoes that made her feet look
big. He decided that Jerry could
have her. She saw him smile and
thought everything was all right.

"You know, honey, that made me
feel awful foolish last night."

"Tough."

"If that's the way you're going to
talk, I'll leave now."

He went back to his magazine.

"Roy, did you hear what I said?"

"Yeah, I heard."

She left.

He spent the rest of the afternoon
drifting around. At six thirty, he ate
dinner. His date with Ann was at
seven thirty.

They went to a neighborhood
movie. It was a typical gangster film.
Ann enjoyed the show.

". . . and all that money they
stole!"

"They always get caught," Roy
said nonchalantly.

"They were smart though — all
that planning they did to rob a bank."

"It's not smart to steal like that.
When you rob a bank and get twenty
or thirty thousand dollars, everybody

in the state's looking for you. And if one of the gang gets caught, they all get caught."

"Yes, I suppose that's right."

"Sure it is. The fellow that can get away with a robbery is the one who only goes after the small stuff. For instance, take a man who robs — oh, say, taxicabs. You think they get caught?"

"I don't see why not."

"A cab driver that sees a thousand different faces in the course of the day is hardly going to recognize somebody he only sees for a few minutes in the middle of the night. And the police don't go out of their way to catch the bandit, anyway."

"Why? It's their duty."

"It's not that, Ann. It's like they find the body of a tramp in the railroad yards. You think they're going to throw out a state-wide alarm? They make a routine investigation and let it go at that. They can't put the whole force on something that doesn't make any difference anyhow."

"It does make a difference. All crimes should be punished. Remember when you told me about the time you were arrested for stealing a car? Well . . ."

"Oh, Ann, that was . . ."

"I know it was just a joke and you were lucky you didn't have to go to jail, but suppose you had never been caught. Why, Roy, you might have become a criminal!"

They walked along quietly for a while.

"Find any prospects for a job yet?"

"There's plenty of prospects, but none of them are any good."

"But, Roy, you have to start somewhere."

"Yes, but they either won't pay a good salary or if they pay good money, they drive you until you drop. I worked on an assembly line, and I know. The pay's good, but there's always someone on your neck."

"You should try a small place."

"Yeah, work your head off, then have the boss's son take over."

"You have to do something, Roy."

"The only way to get anywhere is to be in business for yourself."

"That's true, but you have to learn somewhere."

They were at her apartment house. The self-service elevator took them to the third floor. Roy opened the door to 3-C. It was a well-kept, three-room apartment. The young girl sitting on the couch turned off the radio and got up. Roy paid the baby-sitter and she left. Ann brought in two drinks and they sat on the couch together. He left at eleven.

The night air was cool. Ann was a nice girl. If her husband hadn't had that insurance when he died she sure would be in a fix. He felt like a drink before going to bed. He stopped at Al's. The new bandstand really looked good. It changed the place somehow. Gloria sat at the end of the bar with her convertible-driving bookie friend. The low lights made her look rather pretty. He might as well cut in. Roy walked up behind her.

"How 'bout a dance, Glory?"

"Well! Mr. Milkshake. Slumming?"

He smiled.

"Uh-huh."

"Get lost."

He lay on his bed listening to the twelve o'clock news summary. He snapped it off and picked up a magazine, but he just paged through it. That tramp! She's got her guts talking to me like that. Her and her bookie friend. He walked to the bureau, stood before the mirror, and brushed his hair. He took the pistol from the drawer and put it in his pocket.

The cab driver swallowed hard. It made his Adam's apple jump. He looked down at the gun pressed against his ribs and then into Roy's face.

"You won't get away with it, Mac. The cops got this neighborhood covered tonight."

"Then you shouldn't be worried."

Roy lifted the gun and put it next to the cabbie's head.

"Look, Mister, I just came on, honest. I only got five bucks, here take it. I'm married — yeah, two kids, one's-three, the other's . . ."

"Get out and walk up the street. Start yelling and I'll shoot."

The cabbie got out of the car and backed away. Roy put the gun away. He drove the cab across town, pulled in and stopped in a "No Parking" zone. He looked at his watch. Quarter of two. Time for a drink before the

bars closed. A block from where he parked the cab, he found a bar and went in.

"We're gettin' ready to close, buddy."

"I only want a beer."

"Okay, but you'll have to drink it fast."

Five lousy bucks. Risk your neck for five lousy bucks. . . .

" . . . another taxicab was held up tonight in the Roland Park section. Police believe the bandit to be the same man who yesterday morning held up and robbed driver Samuel Horton of forty-three dollars. The methods used in both holdups were similar. However, the victim of tonight's robbery, Thomas L. Martin, of 2345 Oakhurst Road, furnished the police with the first good description of the robber. The police are on the lookout for this man. He is approximately five feet ten inches tall, even-featured, weighing about one hundred sixty-five pounds, and he has dark hair and dark eyes. When last seen, he was wearing a gray felt snap-brim hat and a gray belted trench coat. This man is armed. If you see anyone resembling this description, notify the police immediately. This is Station WBXA, 1420 kilocycles on your dial. The next newscast will be at six A.M."

The driver snapped off the radio and cleared his throat. Roy looked at the man's eyes reflected in the mirror. He took the revolver from his pocket and laid it in his lap. As soon as they

passed the bridge . . . The driver blinked his lights at a darkened car parked at the curb. Roy spun around and looked out the rear window. The car's headlights came on. It made a quick U-turn and started after them. Roy pulled the hammer back on the revolver and pushed the muzzle of the gun into the cabbie's neck.

"When they pull us over to the curb, you're goin' to tell them there's nothing wrong, aren't you?"

"Anything you say, Mister."

The police car pulled alongside the cab. There were two cops in it.

"Anything wrong, cabbie? . . . I said, is there anything wrong, cabbie?"

"No, no trouble, Officer."

"Pull over!"

One of the policemen got out of the car and came around the front of the cab. He was moving fast. As he passed the headlights, Roy saw his hand flash to the flap of his holster. Roy pushed the door open, brought his gun up level, and fired twice. The policeman staggered, his knees buckled, and he sagged against the front fender of the cab. The veins in his temple bulged as he tried to raise his pistol, but his efforts ceased with a short gasp, and he slid off the fender to the ground. Roy hesitated for a moment as he looked down at the dark crumpled uniform. Then he ran — across the street and through the shrubbery at the edge of the schoolyard. He heard the echo of a voice shouting at him to halt . . . halt! The yellow-orange muzzle flash, the

flat banging sound. He kept on running. . . .

He drank coffee and listened to the police calls on the radio until five o'clock in the morning. He set the alarm for seven and tried to sleep. The room was stuffy. He opened the window. He tossed from one side to the other.

"I picked him up in front of the Oakley bar, around two o'clock. Yeah, it must have been two o'clock, because there was another bar down the street, and it was letting out, too. Anyhow, he wants to go across town, so we're driving along, and he's not saying much, and I turned on the radio and hear that newscast about Martin's cab being held up earlier. So, I'm looking in the mirror at this guy's face, when they give the description. It was kinda dark, but it musta been the same guy. Gray hat, gray coat, even features — yeah, same guy, all right. Then I spotted the prowler car and blinked my lights. . . ."

The man in the dark blue uniform was talking to him, but he couldn't hear what he said. The uniform crumpled and turned red. The siren wailed. . . . His gun, where was his gun? He sat up quickly and turned off the alarm. He put his pants on over his pajamas and took the leather jacket from the hanger. He turned on the hot plate, started the coffee, and left.

The newsstand on the corner had just opened.

"Up kinda early, ain't ya, Roy?"
"Yeah."

He waited until he was back in bed with his coffee and a cigarette before he opened the paper. It was on the front page this time.

PATROLMAN SHOT BY BANDIT

ARTHUR F. WELSLEY KILLED
WHILE ATTEMPTING TO THWART
HOLDUP

BANDIT ESCAPES

Patrolman Arthur Francis Welsley, 46, of 1632 Woodlawn Drive, was shot and killed at 2:17 A.M. this morning by a bandit believed to be responsible for the recent wave of taxicab robberies in the Roland Park section. Patrolman Welsley, along with Patrolman John V. Hackett, 34, of 4352 Elmore Avenue, were cruising in the Roland Park district when they noticed what appeared to be a signal from a passing cab. . . .

He drank another cup of coffee and got dressed.

He walked. They still didn't know who he was. He needed money, help. If he could only get out of town for a while to avoid being picked up in the dragnet. . . . There was always that old car-theft rap. They'll be picking up everyone with a record. . . .

The man in front of him stopped, and Roy bumped into him.

"That's where it was, right out in the street there. See how they've marked it off where the cop got killed?"

"Think they'll get him?"

"Yeah, they've got a hundred cops looking for him. . . ."

Roy edged away from the crowd. Don't run. Walk slow, just like the rest of them. You have seen it, and now you are going home, slow, just like the rest of them. The patrol car came around the corner and was driving toward him. He turned down the alley to the elementary-school playground. The yard was full of kids. He started running through the little groups, tripping over a skip rope, on his feet again, running, breaking through a circle of children. . . .

What can you do, Punchinello, funny fellow? What can you do, Punchinello, funny do. We'll do it too, Punchinello, funny fellow. We'll do it too. . . .

At the edge of the schoolyard he slid down the embankment to the sidewalk. The woman with the baby carriage stopped and stared at him as he got to his feet. He ran.

What can you do, Punchinello, funny fellow? What can you do, Punchinello, funny . . .

He rang the bell to Apartment 3-C. No answer. He rapped. He was pounding on the door.

"ANN!"

The door opened.

"Roy! For heaven's sake . . ."

"Let me in, Ann, let me in."

He brushed by her and walked to the window. He looked down at the street, lit a cigarette, dragged on it once, and crushed it out.

"Roy, what on earth's wrong? Answer me, Roy."

He sat down heavily in the chair, his head in his hands.

"What have you done? Is someone after you?"

He let his hands drop and stared up at her blankly.

"Roy?"

He picked up the morning paper from the coffee table and opened it.

"I don't understand. What is it?"

"I killed him, Ann. It was me. I killed him."

She took the paper from his hands and read the headlines as if she were reading them for the first time.

"You're trying to frighten me, Roy. It's a joke."

He was standing on his feet now, shouting, sobbing out the words.

"I killed him! Can't you understand that? I killed him!"

"Why, Roy, why?"

"Do you think I meant to! He was reaching for his gun, and the next thing I knew, he was lying on the ground."

"What were you doing with a gun? What were you doing there in the first place?"

He collapsed into the chair; his effort was gone. He spoke quietly, running his hands through his hair.

"I've been holding up cabs for a month. I needed the money. It was the easiest way to get it."

He looked up at her.

"I never meant to kill anybody, Ann, I never meant to kill anybody."

"Roy, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I don't know. I'll have to get out of town. I need help, Ann. Will you help me?"

"Roy, I don't . . . Roy, give yourself up."

"But they'll hang me."

"Roy! Roy!"

"I only have twenty dollars. I have to have some money."

"I have to think, Roy. I have to think."

"Money, Ann, money!"

"Please, Roy, give me some time."

"It's one o'clock now. I'll call you at four. Please, Ann, please!"

He walked to within two blocks of his rooming house. His money, everything was in the room. He had to chance it. He went into Al's bar. It was crowded. He found a seat near the wall and ordered a beer.

"So what do you say, Jerry? Think they'll get this guy?"

"Not unless the cops have more than what they put in the papers. That description could fit a million guys. It was dark. How did they know what the guy looked like?"

"Yes, but he killed a cop. They probably have half the force on the case. They always get cop killers."

Al turned on the bar radio.

". . . and Patrolman Hackett has been criticized for not giving chase to the fleeing bandit. However, it might be said . . ."

Roy paid for his beer and left.

He put on his best suit, put his gun in his hip pocket, his money in his hand, then paused at the door for a last look around the room. His trench coat. He threw it over his arm and started down the stairs. The fat old cleaning woman blocked his way.

"There's a 'phone call for you."

He went to the head of the hall and picked up the telephone.

"Roy? Roy, I've got the money. A hundred dollars."

"Ann, honey!"

"You can't come back here, Roy. I'll have to meet you."

"Where are you now?"

"In the drugstore, down the street from the bank."

"Wait there, I'll be right over."

"Not here, Roy, I'm afraid."

"In front of the movie, at North Avenue and Charles. Okay, baby, I'll see you in fifteen minutes."

The billboard across the street advertised cigarettes: a smiling bell-boy stood with his hand outstretched, offering a partially opened pack. Roy stood in the doorway, out of the rain. Twenty-five minutes. What if they've picked her up? Then he saw her crossing the street with the green light. As she approached the near curb, he stepped out into the rain to meet her.

Two men came out of the cigar store

on the corner and walked toward him. He moved to one side to pass, and they separated. One tackled him around the ankles, the other around the neck.

"ANN!"

He fought for his gun. Someone else jumped him from behind. He was on the pavement, his face pushing against the concrete . . . a sharp blow on the back of his head . . . twisting his arm. A dull pounding . . . splotchy whiteness before his face.

"Ann . . . Annn . . ."

The face was long and sneering, then wide and smiling. The outstretched hand with the cigarettes wavered and withdrew. The hand held a gun. He was sitting up. Figures were all about him. His wrists were cold. He couldn't get his wrists apart. He was pulled to his feet.

"Ann."

An old woman in a crowd . . . they were all old.

"ANN."

"Oh, Roy! Roy! I had to . . . I had to!"

The door opened. He was pushed into the car. He sank back against the seat. The blackness danced, screaming in his ears. His back was wet against the seat. The wind blew in his face.

Punchinello, funny fellow, what can you do, what can you do . . .

You have just read Robert Passano's first story, which won a special award in EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest. Now we give you Mr. Passano's second story, written and submitted one year after the first, and this second

story won a special award in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. This is the first time in the history of EQMM — perhaps in the history of all magazine publishing! — that readers have been offered the first and second stories written by the same author in the same issue of a magazine.

We hope that you will agree with us that Robert Passano has made remarkable progress in a single year. His style, we think, is smoother and richer; his characterizations are firmer and more three-dimensional; his plot construction has become, in one short year, fuller, more imaginative, and more subtly integrated. And most important, Mr. Passano has retained that deep sense of integrity and quality which so clearly marked his earliest story in print.

FRIEND OF THE FAMILY

by ROBERT PASSANO

WHEN THE BUZZER ON THE inter-com sounded, Harry flicked the conversation switch and heard Lucille's crisp voice from the outer office.

"Mrs. Flory to see you, Mr. Bremelman."

He told Lucille to send her right in. He reached under his desk for his cane, and, as Grace Flory came into the office, he pushed himself to his feet.

"Oh, Harry, don't bother, please."

He eased himself back into the chair as she came across the room. She pulled off her long gloves and sat down opposite him. Harry asked her what brought her into town at nine thirty in the morning.

"Oh, it has just been so long since I have had a chance to shop . . ."

Harry leaned forward smiling, watching her very expressive face.

" . . . and really, people must have thought I was crazy, the middle of November with the top down, but what good is a convertible if you never put the top down . . ."

She babbled on — every little detail about her drive into town. He enjoyed watching her talk. She wasn't beautiful, hardly even pretty, but her face was easy to remember. To Harry, she had hardly changed in the fifteen years she had been married to Vic. He remembered when, as Vic's best man, he had stood in the vestibule of the church in his cutaway coat and striped trousers, worrying about the length of his right pants cuff that hung a little too low on his withered leg. And no one even noticed.

" . . . and when I reached the city limits, I could smell the bay. It must have been the fog. You would think that by nine o'clock it would have

lifted or blown out over the bay or would have gone wherever fog goes . . . ”

Yes, the fog had been bad this morning, he told her. And he remembered his own drive across town at seven thirty that morning. Twice, he had almost run into the car in front of him. Not that it would have mattered about the car. The grille had been pushed in for a month now. And when he finally reached Federal Hill, it was like rising from the dead, coming up out of the fog into a fine mist between the rows of apartment houses, crossing Thirty-fifth Street and driving up Tudor Road. When he turned the car around on the hill and parked a half-block from the Tudor Arms, he could see the canopied entrance plainly. The mist on Federal Hill was more like a fine veil. It was . . .

“ . . . Harry, I honestly think that you should move out of the city. When I think of you living in those two horrible little rooms in that hotel all these years, well . . . ”

He smiled again, and told her that it was really a very nice hotel, and he had got used to it.

“I just think that you should get out more. You used to come and spend a weekend with us at least once a month. I should think the weather this time of year would be bad for your leg. Does it give you a great deal of trouble any more, Harry?”

Oh, when the weather changed, it ached a little. He was used to it, he

said. Yes, he had got used to a great many things. Fifteen years ago, when his friend Vic Flory had started the contracting firm and made him vice-president, he hadn't wanted to take the job. He had been used to the pity given a cripple. But it was a chance to prove that he could be of some use, that he was no longer a handicapped child. And back in the days when *Victor W. Flory & Associates, Contractors, Builders and Engineers* was just a name, and the president and vice-president were all there were to the firm, he had been of use. Vic handled the field work and Harry took care of their little one-room office. And he remembered the nights when they sat up figuring the estimates, where to cut down to get the jobs. They had got the jobs. The firm was no longer a hollow name. It was written across the pay checks of all the people on the fourteenth and fifteenth floors of the Matherson Building. But Harry was less of a power now than he had been in the one-room office.

“We do miss you, Harry, and I wish that you would come out to see us more often.”

He smiled and nodded, expecting her to keep talking, but she fell silent, looking down into her lap and refolding her gloves. He knew the symptoms. He knew all her moods almost as well as if she had been his own wife. She had said all the little things, and now she was searching for the words to tell him why she was really here. He wanted to reach out and hold her

like a child. He asked her what was wrong.

"Does it show, Harry?"

She spoke without looking up. He wanted to help her, but he remained silent.

When she finally raised her eyes, her face was no longer the caricature of an enthusiastic, eager girl.

"Vic's running around again, isn't he, Harry?"

What could he tell her? Could he open the confidential file, show her the receipted bills from the jeweler, from the Tudor Arms? Could he lean forward and tell her how, in the last month, he had parked in front of the Tudor Arms a half-dozen times and watched Vic when he left? He could tell her in detail how many steps Vic took walking down Tudor Road hill before he cut diagonally across the street to the cab stand. He could tell her about the blonde a year ago, or the receptionist at Bigelow's last spring.

"Poor Harry, I really shouldn't put you on a spot like this, but you know, don't you? Oh, I know the signs by now. I've got used to things, too, Harry. I've known about this one for a week. But he trusts you, doesn't he? And you don't want to say anything against him, do you?"

He told her that she could be wrong. He felt foolish as soon as he said it. She was right about everything. Of course Vic trusted him. Harry knew everything that went on in and out of the office. He was the only one whom Vic did trust. He

knew all about Vic's methods of crowding a competitor, or cheating on a job, or buying a politician. That was something she didn't know. That was a side of Vic she hadn't seen. And the girls. Some of them Vic bragged about. The others Harry found out about from the file. Only Vic and Harry handled the confidential file, and if Vic spent money, Harry knew where it went.

"Don't defend him, please, Harry. We both know that I am not wrong. You know how I find out? I have a little system now. He'll call and say that he is working, and Simon will bring the car home. And the next morning, when Simon takes the car back to town, I wait about five minutes and then follow in the convertible. If Simon drives to the Club, I know Vic was telling the truth, and if he drives here and waits, I know that he lied. Simon came here this morning. And he came here twice last week. It's awfully simple, isn't it? I'm surprised that Vic hasn't seen through it yet."

She began to cry quietly and Harry sat helplessly by. He wanted to tell her that this sort of thing couldn't go on forever, but he didn't know how. Finally, she stopped and looked up.

"What am I to do, Harry? The first time it happened, he swore it would never happen again. He got down on his knees and cried, Harry. Then there was that girl in Toledo, and the Lord only knows how many others, and when I find out about

one of them, he always swears it will be the last. What am I to do? Leave him? Last year when I told him I wanted a divorce, he talked me out of it, and we went to Bermuda. Why, he even signed over part of his interest in the firm and all the community property, and he said that if he ever strayed again it would serve him right if I left him and took nearly everything with me. But he knows that I won't leave him, if only for the sake of the children. And now that it has happened again, what am I to do, Harry? What am I to do?"

He found his cane and walked around to her chair. He just stood there while she cried. What *could* she do? With Vic, there was very little anyone could do. Vic got his own way. If he couldn't talk you into something, he rode down your opposition, or he threatened. But, however it was, he generally won in the end. Harry thought of the thousand little orders that he had given and Vic had countermanded, of the things that he had opposed and Vic had pushed through anyway. There were fifty people working in these offices, and not one of them could make a decision on his own. It was a one-man organization, and, as vice-president, Harry didn't have any more authority than the office boy.

In the beginning there had been mutual cooperation, but as the firm grew Vic wanted things to be done more and more his way. Harry had argued and attempted to block Vic in a number of the little practises in

which he did not believe, but Vic had always got around him. And in the end he could only stand by and watch as Vic pushed his way to the top. He had stood by in silence, and he had begun to hate his friend. He had done as he was told, for a long time, and he had become used to it, but his sullen opposition had grown. He could run the firm as well as Vic, if not better. When he looked down at Grace, he was glad that he had killed Vic an hour and a half before. . . .

When Grace Flory left, Harry pushed the buzzer.

"Yes, Mr. Bremelman?"

"Get Martin in here."

Harry swiveled the chair around and looked out the window. He felt like a doctor who had cleaned the city of a disease. And now it was time to clean up the conditions which had caused the epidemic.

"What's up, Harry?"

Harry spun the chair around and looked up at Paul Martin, the Chief Estimator.

"I was going over your bid on the National Can Company job last night, Paul, and there are a few things that I don't particularly like."

"What's wrong? They accepted it, didn't they? We were low at four million six hundred and eighty-five thousand. We have the job, and at a good profit, too!"

"I notice that for all demolition and excavation, you call for non-union labor."

"Of course, but . . ."

"And three-quarters of the subcontractors are out-of-town firms."

"So?"

"We have enough trouble with the unions as it is, without antagonizing them any more. And the subs. Paul, if there is another war, we will have to rely on local subcontractors, and we are not building up good will by cutting them out of these big out-of-town jobs."

"Harry, I went over this whole job with Vic, and he O.K.'d it. In fact, what you're talking about was his idea."

"I don't care whose idea it was. I'm handling this and I'm making some changes."

Paul Martin was silent for a moment. He tucked his tie back into his coat. He was being put in the middle, and he didn't like it.

"Well, Harry, when Vic and I talked it over, I thought along the same lines that you're talking about, but Vic seemed to think that since this job's going up forty miles outside the city, all ordinary labor will have to be recruited out there. And there aren't any unions out there. Why, three-quarters of the men are going to come from farm labor. Harry, if we used union labor, I figured that it would be a difference of fifteen percent. And as long as all skilled and semi-skilled labor is union, there won't be any kick. Vic took care of that. And as far as the subcontracting work goes, Colter City is fifteen miles closer, and by using

as many subs over there as we can, it's going to amount to a substantial saving on transportation."

"Well, you may be right on the labor angle, but I want all plumbing, heating, and electrical work to go to local contractors. We might lose a few dollars, but we'll make it up in good will."

"When Vic comes in I'll have a talk with him about it."

"I'm taking the responsibility for this job, Paul. I want you to pull the files on the job, make a revised bid using local plumbing, heating, and electrical work, and call National Can and tell them we want those changes before we sign the contract."

"What about Clyde Bennett, Harry? He is on the board over at National Can. He stuck his neck out getting us this job, and this is going to put him on a spot."

"Let me worry about that."

"But suppose they don't like it? Suppose they take Anderson's bid?"

"I don't think Anderson's bid was anywhere near ours, even with the increase."

"Harry, I'd rather wait until Vic comes in. I don't think he is going to like this."

"I'm telling you to do it, Paul, and I want it done now."

"Well, if you're taking the responsibility for it, all right, but I still think we should wait for Vic."

When the Chief Estimator had left, Harry reached into the box on his desk and took out a cigar. It was the first time that he had ever coun-

termanded one of Vic's orders, and he half-expected Vic to come into the office and sit down on the edge of the chair opposite the desk. The end of the cigar glowed, and Harry looked over the tops of his glasses at the vacant chair. Vic would come in and sit on the arm of that chair and look down at him and smile and say, "Now why the devil did you do this, Harry?" Or, it might be one of his bad days. He could almost hear the rising tones in Vic's voice as he tossed the estimating sheets on the desk. "I hear this was your idea." Harry almost picked up the imaginary papers in front of him. "Just what are you trying to do to me, Harry? I spend good money tying this job up, and then you fluke the deal with one of your blasted idiotic ideas."

Harry blinked the illusion away and spun the chair around to face the window. It was a bright sunny day. You would never have known that the morning had been foggy. He began to think about Clyde Bennett. There was a man of intelligence and education, who had been tied to Vic for almost as many years as Harry. He remembered when Clyde had opened his law office, and one of his first clients had been the firm. And the first time he ran for the City Council, Vic had backed him. Clyde had been on the secret payroll ever since. Harry remembered that meeting a few years ago, when Clyde told Vic he was resigning from the City Council. He remembered Clyde standing there with the letter of resigna-

tion in his hand, and Vic talking to him like a father explaining away the fears of a confused child. And when Vic had finished talking, Clyde tore up the letter and dropped it in the wastebasket. Harry began to hate Vic that day. Clyde Bennett could begin living his own life now.

The knock on the door interrupted his thoughts, and when he turned the chair away from the window Lucille was standing in front of his desk.

"Mr. Bremelman, John Dietrich is outside, and he wants to see you or Mr. Flory."

"Oh, yes, John Dietrich. What does he want?"

"Well, if you remember, he was in a few weeks ago to see Mr. Flory about financing some houses, and Mr. Flory told him it was too small a job for the firm to handle, but he would inquire around to see what he could do. Do you want me to tell him that Mr. Flory is taking care of it and will let him know when something comes up?"

"No, no, send him in. I'll talk to him."

Lucille stood in front of the desk, feeling she had not explained the situation well enough.

"But . . . Mr. Flory said he did not intend to spend a lot of time on it."

"I said that I'll see him, Lucille."

John Dietrich came into the room smiling, his right hand outstretched.

"You know, Harry, it takes me less time to get in to see the vice-president of the Union Trust than it

does to get in here. You must be getting to be a big man. I guess you've been pretty busy lately."

"Never too busy to see an old friend."

"Did Vic tell you about our little talk a few weeks ago?"

"It was something about some houses, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I have this land out on Locker Road, and I have had the plans drawn up for some houses. And you know, Harry, the way houses are going up these days, financing is getting pretty tight."

"How many houses did you have in mind, John?"

"Only eight. But Vic explained to me that it was too small a job for you people to handle. And I understand that if you took the job yourself, you would probably have to pull men off a big job and might end up losing money. But he said he would look into it and see what he could do for me."

"Well, it's the way you said, things are pretty tight now, but I think we might see our way clear to give you a little help, John."

"Do you mean it, Harry? Things have been a little rough for me lately, and I was telling the wife just the other night that if there were two fellows I could depend on to give me a hand in a pinch, it was Vic Flory and Harry Bremelman. I remember when you fellows first started. Remember, Harry, I gave you one of your first jobs? I knew you fellows wouldn't forget your old friends."

They talked over old times for a while, then Harry told him to stop by Paul Martin's office, and give Martin all the information.

When John Dietrich had left, Harry pressed the buzzer and told Lucille to come into the office. He had never particularly liked the girl. She was too eager to please at the expense of other people. He told her that he had not liked the way things had been going around the office. There was nothing wrong with the quality of work the office staff did, he said, but they were becoming lax about getting to work on time, extending their lunch hours, and quitting a little early. Oh, yes, he knew that everyone wasn't guilty, but he reminded her that he wanted a more rigid policy adhered to in the future. Lucille said she understood, and dutifully stood there, looking down.

"And, oh, yes, Lucille, I'd like you to take a memorandum for the accountant. I want him to look into the possibilities of taking out group insurance for all the office employees. Hospitalization, and that sort of thing. Do you have that?"

As the door closed, Harry turned again to the window. Vic's loose method of dealing with these people was one thing, but actually looking out for their welfare was another. He looked at his watch. It was almost noon. He wondered how long it would be before the news broke. . . .

The buzzer sounded, and Lucille's voice told him that there were two

policemen waiting to see him. Paul Martin led a uniformed policeman and a plainclothesman into the office.

"Good Lord, Harry, this is awful! Vic has been killed by a hit-and-run driver!"

Harry attempted to push himself to his feet, but, forgetting his cane, he fell from the chair. Martin rushed around the desk and helped him to his feet.

"I'm sorry, Harry. That was stupid of me. I know what a shock this must be to you."

Harry had settled himself back in his chair, and was adjusting his glasses. Martin had turned and was talking to the policemen.

"Harry has been with Vic since the firm started. They have been friends since they were boys. This is a terrible shock."

Harry interrupted, asking for details. The man in plainclothes told him that Vic had been run down at eight thirty that morning on Tudor Road near Thirty-fifth Street, and, although they hadn't yet found the driver of the car, they were working on the assumption that it was someone who lived in the immediate neighborhood. He had no doubts whatever that the guilty person would be apprehended by nightfall. And this was one manslaughter charge they were going to make stick! The plainclothesman said that he had known Vic personally and that he would consider this a personal assignment. Harry asked if Mrs. Flory had been notified, and was told that they

had not been able to reach her until a half hour before.

The office staff began to crowd into the room.

"Gray sedan. Eight thirty this morning. Out on Thirty-fifth Street."

"I thought it was a truck."

"No, no, he crossed in the middle of the block. The driver didn't even stop!"

"It's just terrible the way they drive these days!"

"They always get these hit-and-run drivers. They always leave some mark on the car. A thread of clothing, a bloodstain . . ."

The Chief Engineer was calling his wife on the telephone. A cigarette was burning a hole in the carpet. . . .

"Somebody go out and get some coffee."

Martin called Mrs. Flory and was told she had left twenty minutes before. Someone told a joke. A collection was being made for flowers. Martin helped the two policemen to clear the office. . . .

On her way back from the powder room, Lucille wondered if the entire office staff would get the entire day off for the funeral. . . .

When Harry first thought of killing Vic, his thoughts had never got much beyond the point of Vic's actual death. He had planned, of course, on taking over the business and putting into practise those theories in which he had believed all these years, but the reality of Vic's death, and the confusion that followed, completely disrupted him. His mind still held the

picture of twenty or more people crowded into the room; all talking at once, while the police were trying to tell him what they were doing to find the driver of the car. It had almost been too much for him, but when they saw the expression on his face, they believed him to be in a state of shock over the loss of his friend. When Martin had cleared the office, he had a chance to compose himself.

Now Paul Martin sat in the chair opposite Harry's desk.

"Harry, maybe I shouldn't be talking business at a time like this, but Vic's going so suddenly has left things in a muddle. And it's going to take quite a bit of reorganizing to get things running smoothly again."

Yes, he told Martin, they would have to do quite a bit of reorganizing, but . . . The buzzer sounded and Lucille told him that Clyde Bennett was on the 'phone.

"Harry, I just heard about Vic. I have already called the Commissioner, and you can be absolutely positive that they will pick this fellow up within twenty-four hours."

Harry said he was sure the police would do everything possible.

"Now, Harry, I was just talking to Johnson over at National Can, and he told me that some fool in your office has jacked the bid up fifty thousand dollars. You had better get right on that, Harry. They are talking about giving the job to Anderson. You know I am building a house out in the valley, and I was depending on my commission on this deal. . . ."

Harry hadn't known how Clyde would take the news of Vic's death, but it had never occurred to him that it would be anything like this. He stared dumbly at the 'phone, as Clyde Bennett said that he supposed the arrangement he and Vic had had would still continue now that Harry was running the firm. He was still holding the 'phone, long after Clyde had hung up. Martin was talking to him, saying something about getting National Can on the line. Martin left the office. The inter-com began to buzz, and he put the telephone back in the cradle and reached for the conversation switch, but Grace Flory was already in the room.

"Oh, Harry! Harry!"

He pushed himself to his feet and caught her with his free arm as she collapsed against him. He helped her into the chair and stood there with his hand on her shoulder.

"When the police called and told me, I didn't cry, Harry. I didn't feel anything. I went out and got in the car and drove into town, and I didn't think about it all the way in. It wasn't until I was in the elevator. Oh, Harry, he's dead! Vic's dead! What are we going to do, Harry? What are we going to do? Vic's dead! I would have forgiven him anything! Anything! I can't bear it without him, Harry! Vic's dead!"

Harry called Lucille in. She was to go home with Mrs. Flory. Simon was still outside with Vic's car. He was glad when Lucille closed the door behind them.

He sat at the desk, a dead cigar between his lips, listening as Martin told him that National Can had decided to give the contract to Anderson, that Clyde Bennett had called three times.

"We've got to do something, Harry, or the whole firm will come apart! That fellow Dietrich you sent in. We can't play around with him now. We'll be tied up enough as it is. Oh, I realize he's an old friend of yours, but we have to think of the firm now. We have to think this thing out the way Vic would have. . . . That insurance plan of yours will have to be shelved for the time being. . . . And Vic's connections will have to be maintained, Harry. A lot of people are going to try to slip out from under and we'll have to clamp the lid down. . . ."

Harry didn't care. He told Martin to do whatever he thought was best. He sat looking out the window. It hardly mattered any more. The sky was beginning to cloud. He wondered if it would be foggy tomorrow, and then he was aware of Martin again.

"Snap out of it, Harry! They want to talk to you."

The plainclothesman was back, and there were three uniformed policemen with him. They had talked to the superintendent at the Tudor Arms. He had seen the car that had run Mr.

Flory down. He remembered it clearly, because he had seen it before Mr. Flory had been hit. A gray sedan with damaged grille-work. They had just examined Harry's car.

It was quite a while before Harry was aware of his own voice. He was telling them how he had thought for years of killing Vic, and when he had damaged the grille of his own car a month ago, he had decided on a definite plan. The day had been perfect. Yes, he had planned on the fog. He knew almost the exact spot where Vic would cross the street. Yes, he had watched the place for weeks. He was doing sixty miles an hour when he ran Vic down. He figured the body was thrown at least twenty feet. It was surprising, really. There was hardly even a jolt.

When they led him out of the office, he didn't notice the people crowding around the door. He didn't hear their voices, or see their faces.

When the door closed behind them, Paul Martin shouted to the girl at the switchboard, "Get me National Can on the 'phone, and tell Clyde Bennett to get over here right away!"

He started running toward his office, then stopped and turned.

"And Alice, when you finish that, get all department heads in my office. We've got a lot of reorganizing to do. . . ."

There is another "second story" in this issue of EQMM. You may recall that Thomas Flanagan's "The Fine Italian Hand" won a special award as the best "first story" submitted to EQMM's Fourth Annual Contest. It

took Mr. Flanagan three years to write his second story, but that second story, "The Cold Winds of Adesta," which heads this issue, was good enough to win the First Prize of \$2000 in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest.

These two "second stories" by young writers — Flanagan's and Passano's — should offer tremendous encouragement to all new writers in the detective-crime field. They prove what can happen in EQMM's annual contests — everything from acceptance of an author's second story all the way to the winning of the top prize of the year. And these two "second stories" prove something else: they serve notice, in no uncertain terms, that the immediate future of the detective-crime short story is "bright indeed" — just as we predicted six years ago in the Introduction to the very first volume of THE QUEEN'S AWARDS. With new writers like Thomas Flanagan and Robert Passano to lead the way, along with all the others whose "first stories" have appeared in EQMM, "the decades to come will not fail to yield an even richer harvest, giving promise of New Golden Eras which will perpetuate the grandeur that was Poe and Post and the glory that was Doyle and Chesterton." What more could anyone — reader, critic, or editor — what more could anyone ask?



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